Heartland Genealogy Blog Posts March-April 2026

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https://heartlandgenealogy.org

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Table of Contents

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Was AI Hallucinating?
Not at RootsTech
Relatives at RootsTech
Charles Mentzer's Story via Audio
Clinton Wells' Probate File
The Life of Nettie Adell (Wells) Mentzer
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
From Probate File to Video
AI From Transcription to …
Nettie Mentzer in Song and Overview
Using Claude to Analyze Genealogy Data
Can AI Help Untangle a Crawford FAN Mystery?
From Rapidan to Andersonville
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
How a Wrong Residence Revealed a Database Problem
Am I Irish?
Going Sideways?
Why We Struggle
When a FamilySearch 'Reason Statement' becomes a Proof Argument
From Enlistment to Andersonville
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Monday's Diggings
When Records Begin to Speak
Understanding Homestead Laws: What They Required of Kansas Settlers
Digging Into a Homestead File: Washington Marion Crawford's Kansas Land Claim
A Homestead on the Kansas Prairie: Washington Marion Crawford in Ford County, Kansas
Washington Marion Crawford's Homestead Story
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Monday's Diggings
Mary Foster Crawford
Why AI Needs More Context: Lessons from a Mary Crawford Biography
One Deed – Three Generations
Friday Find
More Ways to Tell the Story: Two Videos About Mary Foster Crawford
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Monday's Diggings – A Will That Connects the Wells Family
Using AI to Build a Genealogical Proof Argument
The Crawford-Craig Connection in a Compiled Source
Friday Find: A Crawford Family Bible Record…But Not My Crawfords
Richmond Hammond's Civil War Service
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Monday's Diggings – Two Marriages from my WELLS folder
A Different Look at Richmond Hammond's Military Career
A Family Reconstructed from a Pension File
WikiTree Connect-a-Thon
Friday Finding: A Mystery – Polly Crawford, Orphan of 1816
Richmond Fisk Hammond
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Monday's Diggings – Wells Chancery Record
Sharing AI Stories beyond the Blog
Sorting Fact from Assumption
Casting a Wider Net
Friday Find: Andrew Jackson's Birthplace
Sarah Ellen Ralston
Saturday Night Genealogy Fun
Monday
Cinematic Videos – A Cautionary Tale
RootsMagic Notes
Peace Be Still

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 1, 2026
Crawford,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/01/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-191/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again —

Time for some more **Genealogy Fun!**

Randy Seaver's weekly challenge is always a great excuse to look at our ancestors from a slightly different angle. This week's mission invites us to move beyond names and dates and consider something richer:

1. What activities did one of your ancestors or relatives engage in?
2. How much detail do you really know about those experiences?

Then comes the fun part.

Using the **free artificial intelligence tool Google Gemini 3**, we are challenged to ask AI to describe what our ancestor may have experienced in those activities — whether that was military service, immigration, a cross-country move, an occupation, or public office.

For my contribution, I chose the 1878 move of the James H. Crawford family from Warren County, Indiana, to Dodge City, Kansas. I happen to have three contemporary newspaper articles describing the relocation, so I transcribed those articles and provided them to Google Gemini with a simple prompt:

> *"Can you describe what the family would have experienced during that move?"*

Below is the narrative description generated by Google Gemini:

> Based on the provided documents, the James H. Crawford family experienced a massive logistical shift from the established farms of Indiana to the raw prairie of Kansas. Their move in late February and early March 1878 was characterized by heavy labor, the transport of a complete "mobile farm," and an immediate transition into homesteading.
>
> ### The Chaotic Departure (February 25–28, 1878)
>
> The family's move began with a grueling Monday in West Lebanon, Indiana. The experience was described as a "pulling and tugging through the mud and slop" as the community gathered to watch the loading process.
>
> - **The Freight:** They loaded seven freight cars with approximately 65 tons of cargo.
> - **A Farm on Wheels:** This wasn't just a household move; the Crawfords packed their entire livelihood, including:
>   - **Livestock:** Dogs, chickens, birds, hogs, horses, mules, and cows.
>   - **Provisions:** Hay, corn, potatoes, flour, wheat, and fruit cans.
>   - **Equipment:** Harrows, stoves, wagons, drills, plows, and various boxes and barrels.
> - **Staggered Travel:** The freight train carrying their animals and gear left on Monday, February 25. The family—James, his wife, and their six children—stayed behind for three more days, finally departing on the 9:00 a.m. passenger train on Thursday, February 28.
>
> ### Arrival in Dodge City (March 2, 1878)
>
> After roughly two days on the rails, the family arrived in Dodge City on a Saturday.
>
> - **Social Standing:** They arrived as part of a group of "enterprising farmers" who were noted for their "fine blooded horses" and appearing to be "men of more than ordinary means".
> - **Local Support:** Upon arrival, they were assisted by a "Farmer Willkins," an old acquaintance who helped them find suitable land northwest of the city.
>
> ### Establishing the Homestead
>
> The move concluded with the immediate physical labor of "settling in" during the early Kansas spring.
>
> - **The Claim:** The family moved to a claim located approximately nine miles northwest of Dodge City.
> - **Immediate Toil:** There was no "settling-in" period; the records state they went to work "in dead earnest" and "at once" on their new land.
> - **Family Unit:** For the Crawford family, this meant James and his wife had to manage six children while simultaneously unpacking household furniture and setting up farming implements to ensure a successful first crop.

Was AI Hallucinating?

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 2, 2026
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/02/was-ai-hallucinating/

Did AI Hallucinate “65 Tons of Cargo”?

Yesterday I shared my response to Randy Seaver’s *Saturday Night Genealogy Fun* challenge, which invited participants to use Google Gemini 3 to describe an ancestor’s experience.

For my example, I selected my second great-granduncle, **James H. Crawford**, who migrated from Warren County, Indiana, to Dodge City, Kansas, in 1878. I chose this event for two reasons:

- He was the first Crawford family member to make the move west.
- His brother — my second great-grandfather — followed seven years later.
- Most importantly, I have contemporary newspaper articles describing the migration.

After posting the AI-generated narrative, a reader asked an excellent question:

> Did the AI tool make up the reference to “65 tons of cargo”?

At first glance, that number does sound extreme. Sixty-five tons of goods seems like an astonishing amount for a single family relocating from Indiana to Kansas. It is entirely reasonable to wonder whether AI was “hallucinating.”

In this case, however, the figure came directly from a contemporary newspaper account — not from the AI’s imagination.

What AI *did* blur slightly was context.

The original article was describing a group of emigrants traveling together — not just the Crawford family alone.

Below are excerpts from the relevant newspaper articles.

From West Lebanon, Indiana (1878)

> “…loading the cars with their household goods, dogs, chickens, birds, hogs, hay, corn, potatoes, flour, wheat, harrows, stoves, wagons, drills, plows, boxes, barrels, fruit cans, horses, mules, and cows, making altogether about sixty-five tons in seven freight cars…”

The article goes on to list the families emigrating, including:

- James H. Crawford
- J. M. Fleming
- R. P. Adams
- Mart. Etnire
- Charley Dickerson
- Rankins and Briggs
- And several single men

This clearly describes a coordinated migration effort, not one household's belongings.

Arrival in Dodge City

Two Kansas newspapers further confirm the group arrival:

The Globe-Republican (5 March 1878) lists multiple families, including:

> "J. H. Crawford, wife and six children…"

It also notes:

> "They brought with them about twenty-five horses and mules, farming implements and household furniture."

Similarly, the **Dodge City Times (9 March 1878)** reported:

> "They brought most of their household goods and farming implements with them…"

What This Teaches Us About AI and Genealogy

This exchange highlights something important:

- AI did **not** invent the "65 tons" figure.
- The number was present in the source material I provided.
- However, AI summarized the migration in a way that could be interpreted as applying that entire quantity to the Crawford family alone.

This is not fabrication — it is compression.

And compression can blur nuance.

As genealogists, we are trained to:

- Check original sources
- Understand context
- Distinguish between individual and group events
- Cite carefully

AI can help us visualize and narrate historical experiences — but it does not replace our responsibility to interpret the evidence correctly.

In this case, the "65 tons of cargo" was historically documented. But careful reading reminds us that those seven freight cars carried the combined goods of multiple families beginning new lives on the Kansas prairie.

And that, perhaps, is even more impressive than one family alone.

Not at RootsTech

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 3, 2026
RootsTech
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/03/not-at-rootstech/

Have you ever attended a genealogy conference?

In the “good old days” — that is, before the internet connected us to archives, databases, and experts from our own desks — conferences were one of the primary ways to learn about genealogy. They were where you discovered new records, met leading researchers, and came home energized with fresh ideas.

Today, much of that expertise is available online. We can watch webinars, read blog posts, download handouts, and collaborate with researchers around the world without ever leaving home. So it’s fair to ask: *Do we still need genealogy conferences?*

This week, I won’t be traveling to Salt Lake City for RootsTech 2026, but I will absolutely be participating as part of the #NotAtRootsTech crowd — and there’s still plenty to experience.

As a virtual participant, I’ll be able to:

- Watch the general sessions, where major sponsors often announce exciting new features and tools
- Attend a wide variety of online classes
- Access speaker syllabi for many sessions — even some presented in person
- Participate in Relatives at RootsTech and see how (or if!) I connect with others
- Explore vendor information and take advantage of special offers
- Follow posts from attendees, including the popular “RootsTech Ride Along” on Substack
- Watch highlight videos created by fellow genealogists
- Join the lively #NotAtRootsTech conversations across social media

While I may miss out on hallway conversations and spontaneous meet-ups, it’s hard to beat the opportunity to attend a three-day genealogy conference for free — and without travel expenses.

I’m looking forward to the education, the announcements, the inspiration, and especially the connection with fellow genealogists later this week.

Online registration is still open.

Won’t you join me — even if you’re #NotAtRootsTech?

Relatives at RootsTech

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 4, 2026
RootsMagic,RootsTech
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/04/relatives-at-rootstech-2/

What Am I Going to Do with 39,000 Relatives?

In a recent post, James Tanner over at Genealogy's Star wondered what he was supposed to do with 4,894 relatives at RootsTech.

I smiled at that question.

This year, my Relatives at RootsTech list tops **39,000**.

Clearly, I'm not going to meaningfully interact with all of them. So instead of feeling overwhelmed, I've created a plan.

My Focus: 3rd and 4th Cousins

Rather than scrolling endlessly, I'm concentrating on my **3rd and 4th cousins**. These are the relatives most likely to:

- Share identifiable common ancestors
- Connect to my current research questions
- Potentially overlap with DNA matches

In past years, I copied names and relationship details into a spreadsheet.

And then?

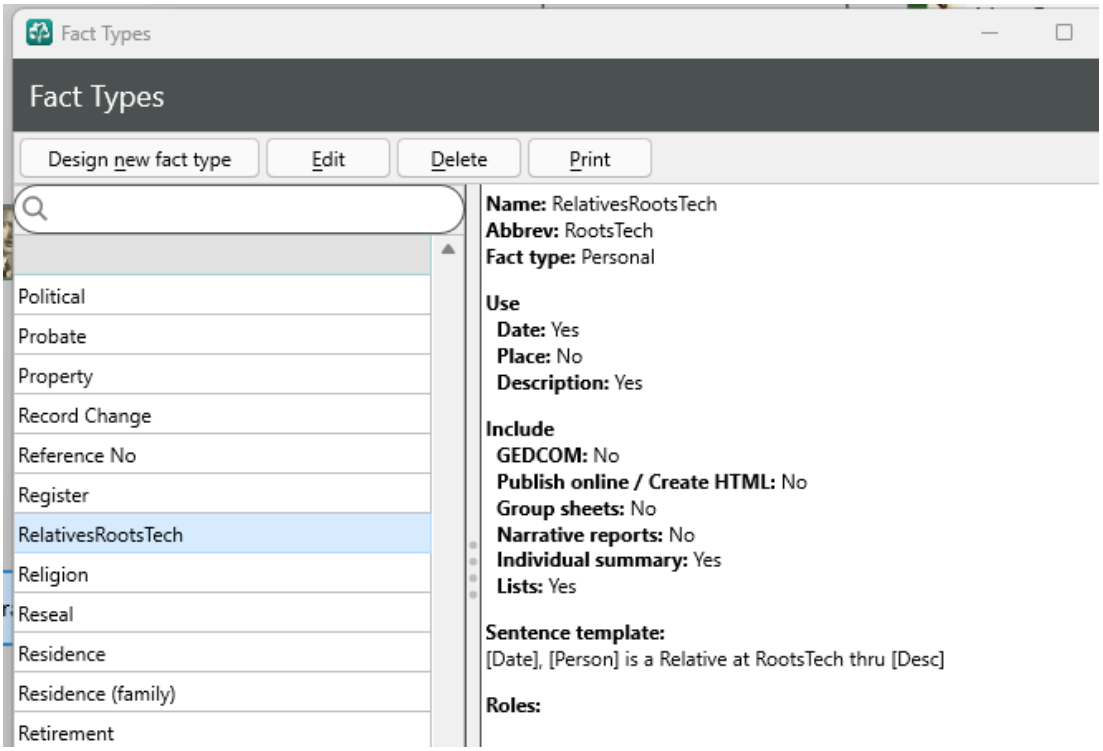
I ignored the spreadsheet.

This year, I'm doing something different.

Turning RootsTech Connections into Research

Instead of letting the data sit outside my working files, I'm entering these cousins directly into my **RootsMagic** database and attaching them to our documented common ancestor.

To make this easier, I created a **custom fact type** in RootsMagic to record our shared ancestor.



With this custom fact in place, I can:

- Tag each cousin with the shared ancestor
- Create a **group** based on that fact
- Quickly relocate all RootsTech connections later
- Systematically document each relationship

No more forgotten spreadsheets.

Extending the Strategy to Ancestry & DNA

I'm also searching for these cousins on **Ancestry**. (Hint: use a similar username or ID on both RootsTech and Ancestry to make this easier.)

If I find them on Ancestry, I check:

- Do we share DNA?
- Are we already connected in my match list?
- Does their tree confirm our documented common ancestor?

This is where Relatives at RootsTech becomes more than a social experience — it becomes a targeted DNA research strategy.

What I've Already Learned

This process has revealed something important:

I have not done enough descendancy research on my fourth cousins.

That realization alone makes this exercise worthwhile.

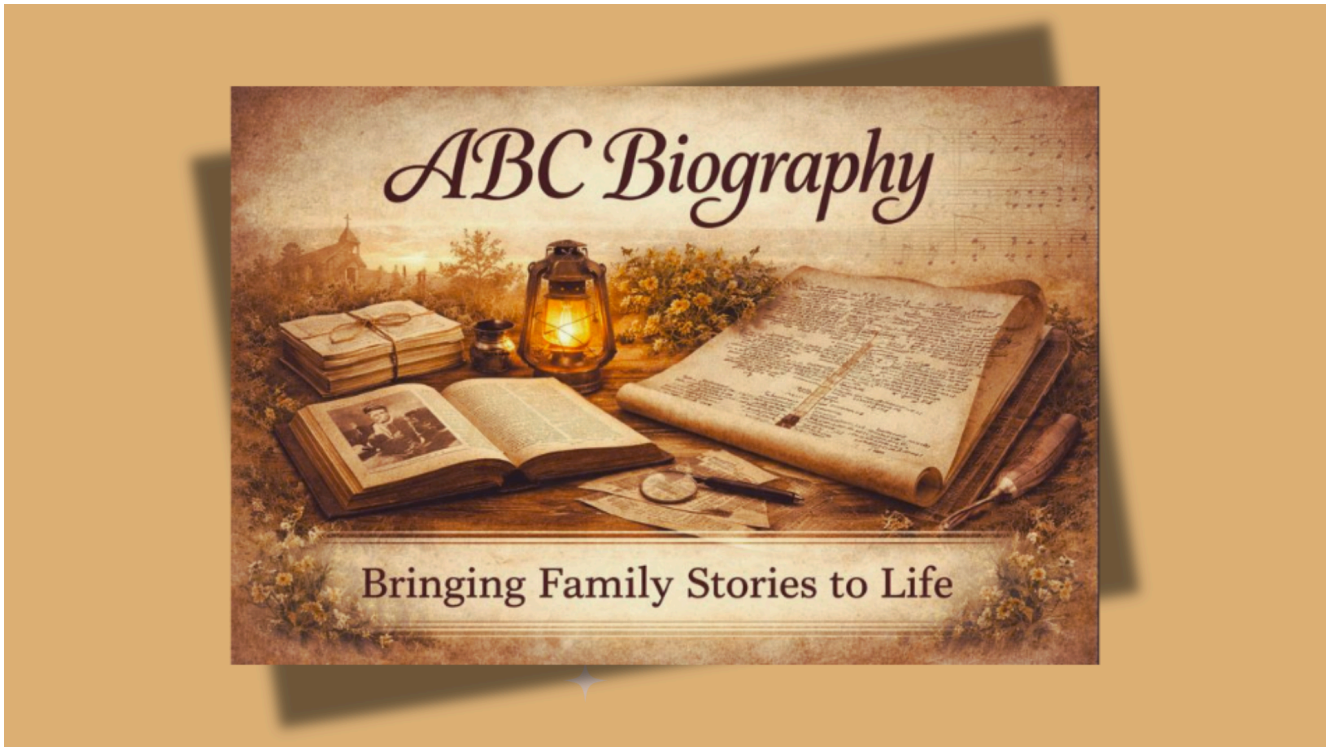
By documenting these cousins now — attaching them properly in RootsMagic and verifying their lines — I'm building the framework I need to better understand my 4th cousin DNA matches.

Instead of randomly chasing matches, I'm strengthening the tree first.

And that feels like progress.

Charles Mentzer’s Story via Audio

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 5, 2026
Mentzer
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/05/charles-mentzers-story-via-audio/



Over the past few weeks, I’ve shared the documented biography of my ancestor, Charles Oliver Mentzer—a Kansas farmer whose life spanned covered wagons, prairie settlement, world wars, and the changing rhythms of rural America. Today, I’m sharing his story in a different format.

Using the narrative drawn from verified records, I created a song inspired by his life and an audio overview generated from his research report. The song was produced on Suno.com using lyrics ChatGPT wrote from the documented timeline, and the audio overview was created with Google Notebook LM. Both videos are now available on YouTube.

These projects represent another way to preserve and share family history—not just as dates and documents, but as story, voice, and memory.

Below you’ll find the videos featuring Charles Oliver Mentzer’s life in song and spoken narrative.

Along the Neosho River

https://youtube.com/watch?v=6JjbKUYnHEM

Audio Overview of His Life

https://youtube.com/watch?v=yo9LQ5n0u08

Clinton Wells' Probate File

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 6, 2026
Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/06/friday-find-111/

The Probate of Clinton K. Wells (1932, Eaton County, Michigan)

As I continue working through my WELLS notebook, I'm sharing another document that once lived only in my paper files but is now preserved digitally — the 1932 probate file of **Clinton K. Wells** of Eaton County, Michigan.

At first glance, Clinton might seem like a collateral relative tucked off to the side of my tree. But when we map the generations, he becomes much more meaningful.

- **Ozias Wells** – my 3rd great grandfather
- **Benjamin Franklin Wells** – son of Ozias
- **Clinton K. Wells** – son of Benjamin Franklin Wells

That makes Clinton K. Wells my **first cousin three times removed**.

Sometimes it's these collateral lines that help fill in the broader family story.

The Probate File

Clinton K. Wells died on **10 May 1932**. The probate file from Eaton County, Michigan includes:

- Petition for probate of will
- Copy of his 1922 Last Will and Testament
- Testimony determining legal heirs
- Estate valuation
- Land descriptions
- Later probate for his widow, Lydia A. Wells

The documents confirm that Clinton was a resident of **Vermontville, Eaton County, Michigan**, and that he died in **Kalamo Township**.

His Immediate Family

The probate determination of legal heirs identifies only two survivors:

- **Lydia A. Wells**, wife
- **Nellie M. (Wells) Barningham**, daughter

No additional children or heirs are named, suggesting that Nellie was likely the only surviving child in 1932.

The 1922 Will

Clinton executed his will on **14 March 1922**. It was witnessed by Lewis J. Dunn and John C. Nichols of Charlotte, Michigan.

The will provides valuable genealogical and land information:

Land Devised to Wife – Lydia A. Wells

In Kalamo Township:

- East ½ of the NE ¼ of Section 3
- West ¼ of the NW ¼ of Section 2

Land Devised to Daughter – Nellie M. Barningham

In Vermontville Township:

- East ½ of the SE ¼ of Section 34

In addition, Nellie received **$2,000** from the personal estate.

All remaining real and personal property was left to Lydia.

Estate Value in 1932

The estate was estimated at:

- **$4,000 in real estate**
- **$7,500 in personal property**
- Total approximately **$8,000**

For 1932 — during the Great Depression — that represents a substantial estate.

What Happened Next?

Lydia A. Wells died on **19 January 1941**, intestate (without a will). Her probate file identifies one heir:

- **Nellie Barningham**, daughter, age 54, of Vermontville

This reinforces that Nellie appears to have been the sole surviving heir of the couple.

Why This Record Matters

Even though Clinton is not in my direct line, this probate file helps:

- Confirm the children of Benjamin Franklin Wells
- Document residence in Kalamo and Vermontville
- Provide precise land descriptions
- Establish financial standing of the family
- Clarify that only one child survived into the 1930s

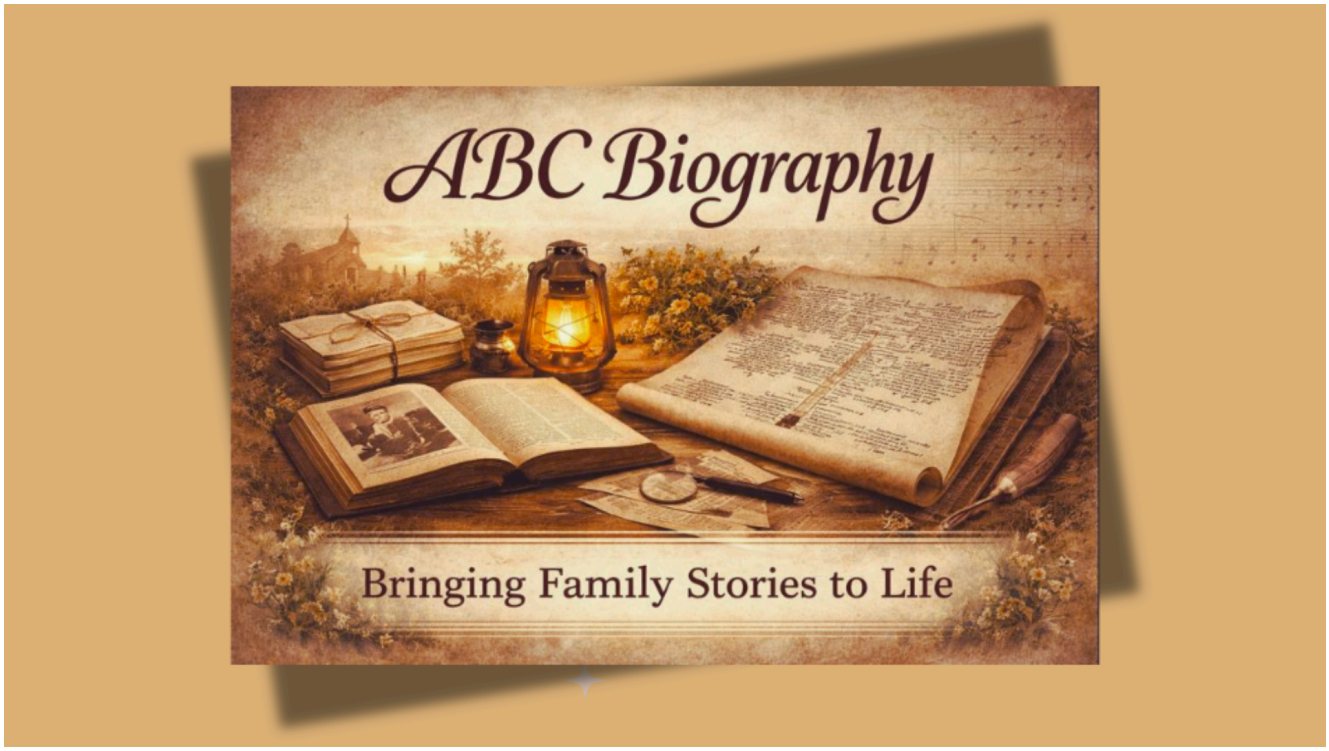
Collateral research strengthens the entire tree.

Sometimes the most valuable finds are not about our direct ancestor — but about the cousins who help confirm the structure of the family.

And that's why this probate file earns a place in my Friday Finds.

The Life of Nettie Adell (Wells) Mentzer

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 7, 2026
ABC Biography,Mentzer,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/07/the-life-of-nettie-adell-wells-mentzer/



Rooted in Kansas Soil

5 February 1873 – 9 February 1939

Introduction

Every family tree has a few ancestors whose lives quietly shaped the generations that followed. Today on *Heartland Genealogy*, I'm sharing the story of **Nettie Adell (Wells) Mentzer**, one of those steady, steadfast women whose life was rooted deep in Kansas soil.

Nettie's story unfolds through census records, county histories, and beautifully detailed newspaper accounts—including a joyful write-up of her 1893 wedding and a heartfelt obituary that captured her character. Together, these pieces reveal a woman devoted to her family, her church, and the daily rhythms of prairie life.

A Kansas-Born Daughter of Pioneers

Nettie Adell Wells was born on **5 February 1873 in Woodson County, Kansas**—truly one of Kansas' native daughters.

She was the youngest daughter of **Thurston Kennedy Wells** and **Salome (Crandall) Wells**. Her father had been born in New York and, as a young man, moved west to Iowa where he married Salome, a native of Ohio. In 1870, they brought their growing family to Kansas, joining the steady wave of settlers who were transforming prairie into farmland.

Nettie was born on the Wells homestead in the Pleasant View community north of Yates Center. Later, when her parents retired and moved into town, she cared for them in their final years. Both of her parents died in 1893—the same year Nettie would begin a new chapter of her own life.

Her Siblings

Nettie grew up in a family of seven children. Those recorded as living in later accounts were:

- **Francis (Frank) Wells**
- **William Wells**, who later lived in Iowa
- **Anna Wells**, who married Fred Mentzer
- **Nettie Wells**, who married Charles Mentzer

Her obituary later noted that a sister and a brother had preceded her in death.

A Joyful Wedding in 1893

On **18 October 1893**, Nettie married **Charles Oliver Mentzer** at the home of his parents in Center Township, Woodson County, Kansas.

The local newspaper captured the celebration in glowing detail:

> *"About fifty friends of the two families gathered at the Mentzer homestead to witness the ceremony and help to launch the happy pair on the voyage of wedded bliss… it was a splendid example of Kansas bounty and Kansas cooking… The News hopes that every happiness may attend them."*

Charles was described as "an energetic, intelligent, well-to-do young farmer," and Nettie as "a worthy companion for the young man whose name she now bears."

It's easy to picture the evening—neighbors arriving by wagon, the parlor filled with friends, and a dining table heavy with homemade dishes. Afterward, the newlyweds began life together on a farm northwest of Yates Center.

Five Children to Bless Their Union

Five children were born to Charles and Nettie:

1. **Gladys Olive Mentzer**
   Born 9 July 1894
   Later Mrs. Roy V. Green of Kirwin, Kansas
2. **Paul Emory Mentzer**
   Born 28 March 1896, Woodson County, Kansas
   Later of Lyons, Colorado
3. **Pauline Edith Mentzer**
   Born 28 March 1896, Woodson County, Kansas
   Later Mrs. E. O. Briles of Emporia, Kansas
4. **Leslie George Mentzer**
   Born 23 August 1898, Woodson County, Kansas
   Later of Neosho Falls, Kansas
5. **Herbert Wells Mentzer**
   Born 20 July 1900, Woodson County, Kansas
   Later of Talala, Oklahoma

By 1910, Nettie had been married sixteen years and was the mother of five living children. Her life during these years revolved around raising her family and supporting the farm household.

Life on the Kansas Prairie

For about fourteen years, Charles and Nettie farmed northwest of Yates Center. Later, they moved to the Neosho Falls area, where Nettie would spend the final thirty years of her life.

As a farm wife married in 1893, Nettie's days would have been full from dawn to dusk. She likely:

- Cooked on a wood or coal stove
- Baked bread and preserved fruits and vegetables
- Hauled and heated water
- Washed clothes by hand
- Sewed and mended clothing
- Tended a garden and poultry
- Helped manage the household economy

Farm women were not simply homemakers—they were economic partners in the family enterprise. Their work kept farms functioning.

Her obituary beautifully summarized her life and character:

> *"Her home and the interest of her children and husband were her main thoughts and prayers. With care and efficiency she ruled her home; always holding before her children honor and high aims. She found beauty, love and joy in doing for others as long as she was able."*

She united with the Christian Church as a young girl and remained a faithful member throughout her life.

A Life Through Changing Times

Nettie's life stretched across extraordinary change.

She was born just eight years after the Civil War ended and twelve years after Kansas achieved statehood. During her lifetime she witnessed:

- The expansion of railroads across Kansas
- The agricultural growth of the late 19th century
- Women gaining the right to vote in Kansas (1912) and nationally (1920)
- World War I (her son Paul served during this era)
- The post-war farm depression
- The early years of the Great Depression

She saw horse-drawn farm equipment give way to automobiles and tractors. She experienced rural isolation gradually eased by mail delivery and telephones. Yet through it all, her life remained rooted in faith, family, and community.

Her Final Years

Nettie spent her later years in Neosho Falls, Kansas.

On **9 February 1939**, just four days after her sixty-sixth birthday, she passed away in Neosho Falls.

She left behind:

- Her husband, **C. O. Mentzer**
- Gladys (Mrs. Roy V. Green)
- Pauline (Mrs. E. O. Briles)
- Paul Mentzer
- Leslie Mentzer
- Herbert Mentzer
- Twelve grandchildren
- Many nieces, nephews, and friends

Funeral services were held at her home in Neosho Falls and at the Christian Church in Yates Center. She was laid to rest in Yates Center Cemetery on 12 February 1939.

Conclusion

Writing Nettie's story reminds me how often the women in our families leave their mark not through dramatic events or public office, but through constancy—through daily love, hard work, and quiet resilience.

Nettie Adell Wells Mentzer lived the life of a Kansas farm wife—devoted, capable, steady, and deeply connected to her family. Her influence lives on not only in records and newspaper clippings, but in the generations that followed.

If you have photographs, letters, or stories connected to the Wells or Mentzer families, I would love to hear from you. Sharing these pieces keeps our family history alive for future generations.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 8, 2026
RootsTech,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/08/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-192/

RootsTech 2026: My Saturday Night Genealogy Fun Recap

RootsTech 2026 wrapped up today, and like many genealogists who couldn't travel to Salt Lake City, I attended several sessions online. Since Randy Seaver's **Saturday Night Genealogy Fun** prompt asked participants to share what they watched and what they enjoyed most, I thought I'd turn my notes into a recap of the sessions I followed over the past three days.

As usual, RootsTech offered a wide variety of topics—from DNA and traditional research strategies to the rapidly expanding role of artificial intelligence in genealogy.

Thursday Sessions

Your AI Toolkit: Essential Tools for Family History Stories — Laryn Brown

This session provided a solid overview of AI tools available to genealogists. For me, it was mostly a review rather than introducing something entirely new to add to my workflow. Still, it was a helpful reminder of how many tools now exist for storytelling and presentation.

DNA Swim School – Part 1: Floating with One DNA Match — Diahan Southard

I always enjoy Diahan Southard's presentations. However, early in the session I realized I was "out in the water with my tree as my only flotation device," so I decided to switch sessions before getting too lost in the deep end of DNA analysis.

FamilySearch Global Tech Forum — Robby Parker, Ian James & Michelle Barber

This session caught my attention because of the idea that **FamilySearch may connect researchers to archival collections around the world**.

As a volunteer with the **Nemaha County Historical Society**, I immediately wondered how valuable it would be if small local archives—like our historical society collections and our Archive.org materials—could eventually connect with systems like FamilySearch.

Another takeaway was the reminder to explore the **FamilySearch Labs** area, where experimental tools and new features are often introduced.

General Sessions

I try to watch the general sessions every year. Historically, many of the biggest announcements about new genealogy technology are introduced during these presentations.

What's New at Ancestry — Crista Cowan

This presentation covered several upcoming changes and tools on the Ancestry platform.

I had already seen some previews through other genealogy creators, but Crista's presentation helped clarify what those updates might mean for everyday researchers.

For additional context, these videos also discuss the new features:

- *Ancestry Aimee – 3 New Game Changing Features on Ancestry*
- *Connie Knox – New Features at Ancestry with Crista Cowan at RootsTech 2026*

Friday Sessions

FamilySearch Full-Text Search — David Ouimette

This was one of the most practical sessions I attended. I learned that **FamilySearch's full-text search capability can be accessed through the catalog**, which opens up new ways to search digitized collections.

AI and Family History — Steve Little

As expected from the title, this session focused on foundational concepts about using artificial intelligence in genealogy. Even though much of it was introductory, it provided a good overview of practical ways AI can assist genealogists.

The Search Party Clues Strategy — Janet Hovorka, Diahan Southard & Crista Cowan

This session was both informative and fun. It emphasized a structured research process:

1. **Spotlight**
2. **Clues**
3. **Sift**
4. **Map**
5. **Dig**

This year's presentation focused specifically on how to work with clues:

- **Collect** clues
- **Lift** information from records
- **Use** those clues to form hypotheses
- **Enter** the information into your research system

It was a great reminder that even with new technology, the fundamentals of genealogical research still matter.

Saturday Sessions

Wanted! Seeking the Identity of Unknown Parents — Dana Palmer

This session was encouraging. It demonstrated that even when researchers begin with very little information, careful analysis and persistence can sometimes lead to identifying unknown parents.

Future of AI in Genealogy — Dave Vance, David Ouimette, Diana Elder, Mark Thompson & Steve Little

This panel discussion explored where artificial intelligence may take genealogy in the future.

Several points stood out to me:

- **AI is evolving rapidly**, and genealogists need to stay informed about new developments.
- **Privacy matters**, especially when using AI tools that may involve living people.
- Researchers must continue to **verify AI-generated conclusions with traditional records**.

The discussion about **family reconstitution** also made me wonder whether similar approaches might help untangle my own **Crawford research problem**.

The panel also recommended staying connected with leaders in the field. Some resources mentioned included:

- Ethan Mollick's newsletter *One Useful Thing*
- The Facebook group **Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence** (moderated by Blaine Bettinger)
- The **Family History AI Show**
- The **Research Like a Pro** podcast

DNA Swim School – Part 3: Diahan Southard

By Saturday, I decided to jump back into Diahan Southard's **DNA Swim School** series.

This session focused on moving beyond simply identifying DNA matches and instead actively using them in research.

Some key takeaways:

- Don’t be afraid to **“jump in the water”** and work directly with your DNA match list.
- **Genetic relationships should align with genealogical relationships.**
- Identify matches in the **correct centimorgan (cM) range** that could descend from your mystery ancestor.
- **Build other people’s trees** when necessary to identify possible connections.

A particularly important reminder:

> Sharing DNA with someone does not automatically guarantee a shared ancestor in the timeframe you expect—especially in populations affected by **endogamy**.

Ultimately, Diahan emphasized a critical point:

DNA alone cannot prove the relationship.
The connection must still be verified with traditional genealogical records.

In other words:

Sometimes you need to **pause the DNA analysis and go back to doing genealogy.**

Final Thoughts

Overall, RootsTech 2026 reinforced something I’ve been noticing for the past couple of years: genealogy is entering a period of rapid technological change.

Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly integrated into research, analysis, and storytelling—but the fundamentals of genealogy remain the same:

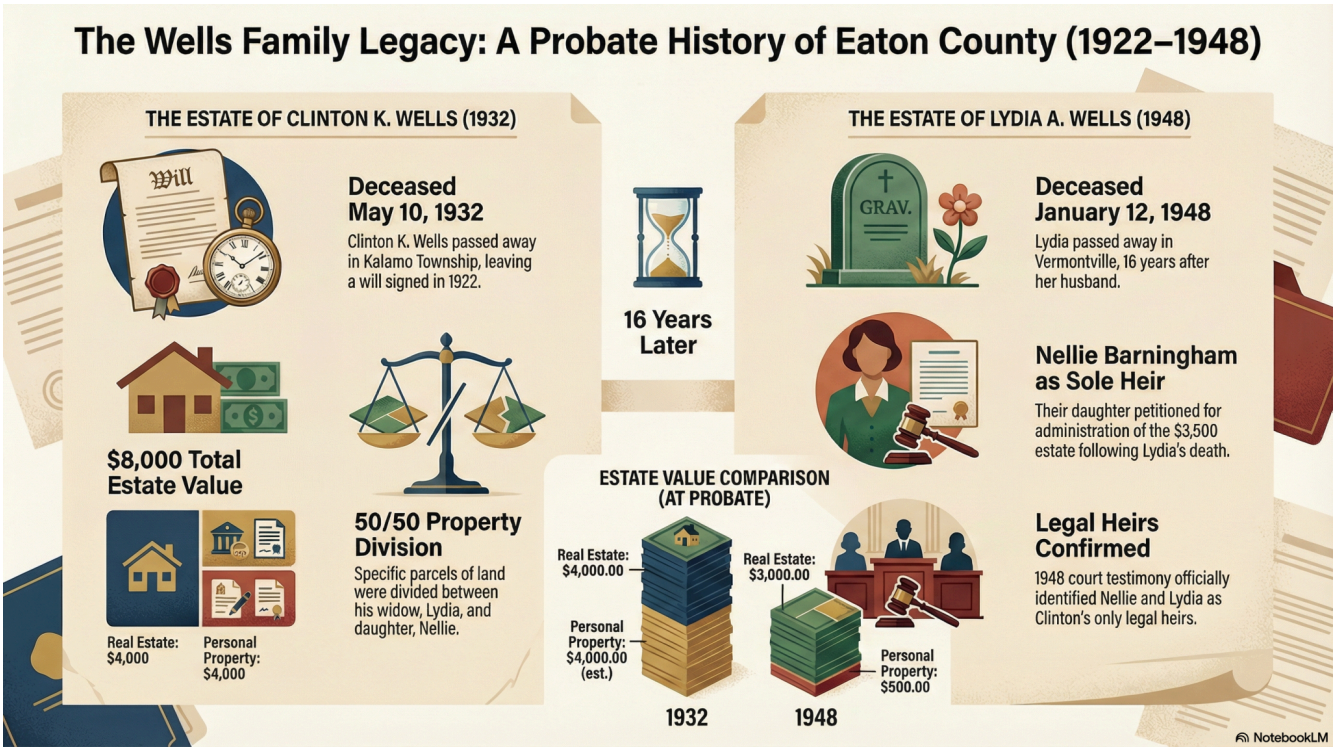
- Careful research
- Source evaluation
- Evidence analysis
- Documenting conclusions

Technology may give us new tools, but **records still prove relationships**.

And that reminder might be the most valuable takeaway of all.

From Probate File to Video

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 9, 2026
Google Notebook LM,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/09/from-probate-file-to-video/


The Wells Family Legacy: A Probate History of Eaton County (1922–1948)
THE ESTATE OF CLINTON K. WELLS (1932)
Will
Deceased
May 10, 1932
Clinton K. Wells passed away in Kalamo Township, leaving a will signed in 1922.
$8,000 Total Estate Value
Real Estate: $4,000
Personal Property: $4,000
50/50 Property Division
Specific parcels of land were divided between his widow, Lydia, and daughter, Nellie.
16 Years Later
THE ESTATE OF LYDIA A. WELLS (1948)
GRAV.
Deceased
January 12, 1948
Lydia passed away in Vermontville, 16 years after her husband.
Nellie Barningham as Sole Heir
Their daughter petitioned for administration of the $3,500 estate following Lydia's death.
Legal Heirs Confirmed
1948 court testimony officially identified Nellie and Lydia as Clinton's only legal heirs.
ESTATE VALUE COMPARISON (AT PROBATE)
Real Estate: $4,000.00
Personal Property: $4,000.00 (est.)
1932
Real Estate: $3,000.00
Personal Property: $500.00
1948
NotebookLM

Clinton K. Wells Revisited

Earlier this week, I shared the 1932 probate file of my first cousin three times removed, **Clinton K. Wells of Eaton County, Michigan**. What began as a simple request to "transcribe" the PDF turned into multiple research outputs — a genealogical abstract, a Friday Find post, WikiTree research notes, and a properly formatted citation.

But I didn't stop there.

Curious about how else I might present the information, I uploaded the same probate PDF into **Google Notebook LM**.

Turning a Probate File into Visual & Audio Content

Within Notebook LM, I asked for two things:

- An **infographic** summarizing the estate, heirs, land, and key dates
- An **audio overview** explaining the probate in narrative form

The infographic provided a clean visual summary of:

- Date of death (10 May 1932)
- Wife: Lydia A. Wells
- Daughter: Nellie M. (Wells) Barningham
- Land distributions in Kalamo and Vermontville Townships
- Estate value during the Great Depression

The audio overview transformed the legal language of the probate into an accessible explanation of what the document reveals about the Wells family structure and financial standing.

From Infographic + Audio to YouTube

Using the infographic as the visual component and the audio overview as narration, I created a short video and uploaded it to YouTube.

Instead of simply reading a document transcription, viewers can now:

- See the family structure visually
- Hear a summary of the estate
- Understand why this collateral line matters to my Wells research

It's the same probate file — just presented in a different format.

Why This Matters

As genealogists, we often focus on collecting documents. But sharing those documents in multiple formats allows us to:

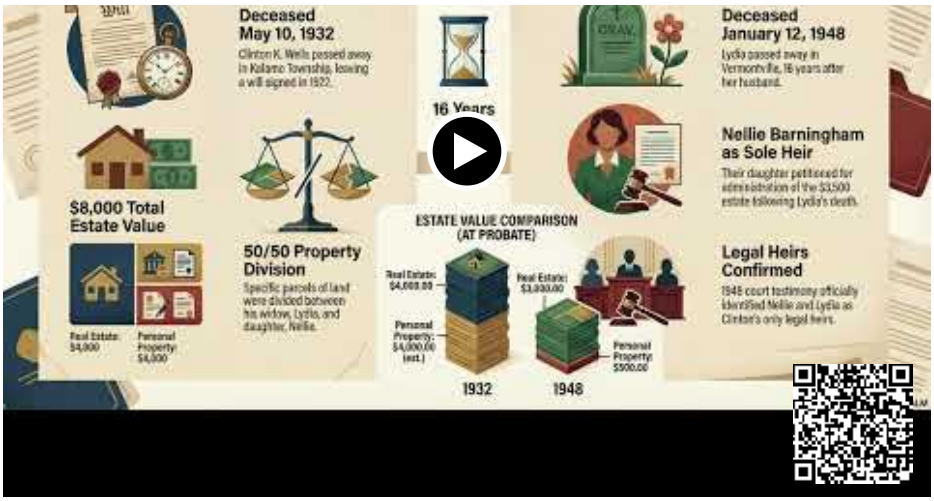
- Reach family members who may never read a probate file
- Preserve research in more than one medium
- Tell the story behind the legal paperwork

Clinton K. Wells was not my direct ancestor, but as the son of **Benjamin Franklin Wells**, grandson of **Ozias Wells (my 3rd great grandfather)**, his probate file helps confirm and strengthen the Wells family structure in Eaton County, Michigan.

This video is another way of telling that story.

Watch the Video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=s387m5Dcd-M



If you've experimented with AI tools like ChatGPT or Google Notebook LM in your genealogy, I'd love to hear how you're using them.

Sometimes all it takes is one probate file — and a willingness to explore what's possible.

AI From Transcription to …

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 10, 2026
Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/10/ai-from-transcription-to/

Are you using Artificial Intelligence in your genealogy research or blogging?

I follow several people who are leaders in the AI field. They share detailed explanations and fairly complex prompts. While I enjoy learning from them, my own approach is much simpler.

For about a year now, I've been using ChatGPT regularly while working on my blog. My two most common prompts are probably:

Transcribe

and

Can you improve (my writing)

That's it.

Short. Direct. Practical.

A Real Example: Clinton K. Wells Probate File

Recently, I uploaded a PDF copy of the probate file for **Clinton K. Wells of Eaton County, Michigan**. My original plan was straightforward: I simply wanted a transcription so I could include it in a *Friday Find* post.

But something interesting happened.

After completing the transcription, ChatGPT suggested additional ways the document could be used. That simple upload turned into a conversation — and that conversation produced far more than I expected.

Here are the prompts that followed:

- **Can you create a clean genealogical abstract?**
- **I want to use this in a Friday Find blog post… can you help write it?**
- **Can you create an "Evidence Explained" citation for this probate file?**

- **Can you format the transcription for a Research Notes section on a WikiTree profile?**

Each time, ChatGPT responded with structured, usable content tailored to my workflow.

From One PDF to Multiple Research Assets

From a single PDF probate file, I ended up with:

- A complete transcription
- A clean genealogical abstract
- A polished Friday Find blog post
- A properly formatted WikiTree Research Notes section
- An Evidence Explained–style citation

That's five research outputs from one document.

And none of the prompts were complicated.

AI as a Research Assistant

I don't use AI to replace my research. I use it as a research assistant.

It doesn't decide relationships.
It doesn't build my tree.
It doesn't replace analysis.

What it does do is:

- Save time
- Organize information
- Improve clarity
- Format material for different platforms
- Help me think through how to present findings

In other words, it helps me share my research more effectively.

Simple Prompts. Real Results.

You don't need complex programming-style prompts to benefit from AI in genealogy.

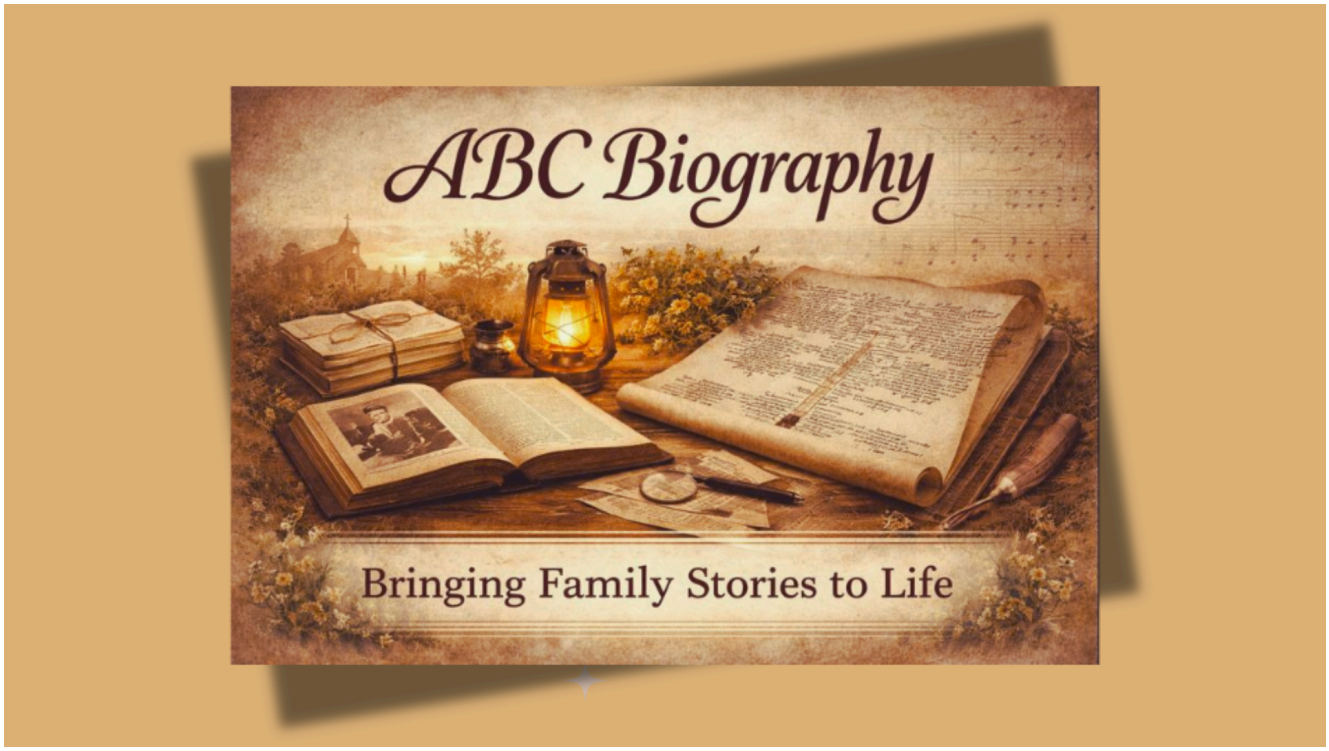
Sometimes all it takes is:

Transcribe.

And then, a willingness to continue the conversation.

Nettie Mentzer in Song and Overview

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 11, 2026
ABC Biography,Mentzer
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/11/nettie-mentzer-in-song-and-overview/



From Prairie Records to Digital Storytelling: Nettie Wells Mentzer in Song and Sound

When I first began gathering records for **Nettie Adell (Wells) Mentzer (1873–1939)**, I was simply doing what genealogists do — collecting census entries, reading obituaries, checking county histories, and building a timeline.

But as her story unfolded, it became clear that Nettie's life deserved more than a list of dates.

She was a Kansas-born daughter of pioneers. A farm wife in Woodson County. A mother of five. A church member. A woman who lived through railroads, suffrage, World War I, and the early years of the Great Depression — all while tending her home and family on the prairie.

So I decided to experiment.

Turning a Biography into a Ballad

Using the documented facts of Nettie's life, I created original lyrics inspired strictly by the historical record. Those lyrics became the song **"Rooted in Kansas Soil."**

The song reflects:

- Her 1873 birth on a Woodson County homestead
- Her 1893 wedding to Charles Oliver Mentzer
- The raising of five children
- Her life as a Kansas farm wife
- Her steady faith and devotion to home

Rather than inventing drama, the lyrics lean into what the records already reveal — constancy, resilience, and quiet strength.

The YouTube video below features that song set against images connected to Nettie and her family.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=DEVMiOgPZWs

Music gives us something that written narrative alone sometimes cannot: emotional texture. When I hear the chorus — *"She was rooted in Kansas soil…"* — it captures the feeling behind the facts.

Letting AI Analyze the Evidence

In addition to the song, I also used **Google Notebook LM** to generate an audio overview of Nettie's documented life.

Notebook LM analyzed the compiled research report and produced a conversational-style summary of the evidence. What I find especially interesting about this process is that it reflects back the structure of the documentation — highlighting timelines, relationships, and life transitions in a way that feels almost like listening to a narrated research presentation.

The YouTube video below contains that audio overview.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=kdxt0tbBlaQ

This tool doesn't replace careful genealogical writing. But it does provide:

- A different lens on the same evidence
- A way to "hear" the structure of a life story

- A format that may appeal to family members who prefer audio over text

---

Why Experiment with Song and Audio?

As genealogists, we spend a lot of time working with paper — or pixels that originated as paper. Census pages. Marriage licenses. Obituaries. Probate files.

But our ancestors did not live in bullet points.

By turning Nettie's biography into:

- A traditional narrative
- A historically grounded song
- An AI-generated audio overview

I'm exploring different ways to bring the same documented life into the present.

For family members who may never read a full research report, a song might resonate.
For those who prefer podcasts to blog posts, an audio overview might connect.
For fellow genealogists, the written biography remains the foundation.

Each format begins with the same evidence. Each format simply tells it in a different voice.

Preserving Story While Protecting Standards

One thing I've been careful about throughout this process: the facts come first.

The lyrics were written strictly from documented events.
The narrative is based on recorded sources.
The audio overview was generated from compiled research — not imagination.

Creative storytelling can coexist with the Genealogical Proof Standard. The key is transparency and discipline.

Nettie's life does not need embellishment. The prairie, the wedding supper, the five children, the church membership, the decades in Neosho Falls — those details are enough.

Keeping Nettie's Story Alive

Nettie Adell Wells Mentzer lived a steady, faithful Kansas life from 1873 to 1939. Through song, sound, and story, her voice carries a little farther now than it did in her own time.

If you watch the videos, I'd love to know:

- Which format connects most with you — song or spoken narrative?
- Do you have family stories that might lend themselves to music or audio?

As always, thank you for walking this genealogical journey with me.

Using Claude to Analyze Genealogy Data

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 12, 2026
Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/12/using-claude-to-analyze-genealogy-data/

Introduction

Recently, I decided to experiment with another AI tool — Claude — to see how it would handle a genealogical narrative for **Nettie Adell (Wells) Mentzer**. But I didn't just ask for a biography. I gave Claude a very specific prompt:

> *"You are a genealogy writing assistant that helps users produce reader-friendly, GPS-compliant genealogical narratives. You turn raw records into biographical sketches, strengthen existing drafts, and help writers refine individual passages — all while enforcing the Genealogical Proof Standard. Never invent facts or citations. Never fabricate sources or repositories. When evidence is insufficient, say so plainly."*

In other words, I asked it to think like a careful genealogist.

What happened next was fascinating.

Claude not only produced a readable narrative — it also pointed out discrepancies in the data. It flagged places where dates didn't perfectly align, where assumptions might need re-checking, and where evidence required clarification. In short, it behaved less like a storyteller and more like a proofreader with a red pen.

That's exactly the kind of assistant I want when I'm writing family history.

Below is the biography Claude produced based strictly on the records provided. As you read, consider how the Genealogical Proof Standard influences both what is included — and what is carefully questioned. This exercise wasn't just about writing Nettie's story. It was about strengthening it.

Nettie Adell Wells Mentzer

5 February 1873 – 9 February 1939

Origins and Early Life

Nettie Adell Wells was born on 5 February 1873 on the Wells homestead in the Pleasant View community north of Yates Center, Woodson County, Kansas.[1] She was the youngest daughter of Thurston Kennedy Wells (a native of New York who had earlier settled in

Iowa) and Salome Adell Crandall (a native of Ohio). The family had come to Kansas in 1870, and Thurston Wells made Woodson County his home until his death on 3 June 1893.[2]

The 1875 Kansas State Census places young Nettie — then two years old — together with her parents and siblings in Liberty Township, Woodson County.[3] She appears again in the same township on the 1885 Kansas State Census, in the household of her father T. K. Wells, confirming a stable upbringing in the rural Kansas community where the family had established itself in the early years of statehood.[4]

Nettie had at least six siblings. According to a published county history, her father's seven children included Frank; William, who later settled in Iowa; Anna, wife of Fred Mentzer; and Nettie herself, along with others who preceded their parents in death. Of the seven, four were still living at the time of their mother's death. With the exception of William, all surviving siblings were residents of Woodson County.[5]

As a girl, Nettie united with the Christian Church — a membership she maintained for the rest of her life. When her parents retired from farming to Yates Center, she remained with them, tending to their needs in their final years. Her father died in June 1893, just months before Nettie's own marriage.[6]

Marriage to Charles Oliver Mentzer

On 18 October 1893, Nettie Adell Wells married Charles Oliver Mentzer in Yates Center, Kansas.[7] The ceremony was performed by the Reverend G. H. Lamb at the residence of the groom's parents in Center Township, with approximately fifty friends and family in attendance. Charles, the oldest son of George and Emeline (Minnick) Mentzer, was described in a contemporary newspaper account as "an energetic, intelligent, well-to-do young farmer." Following the wedding festivities — celebrated with a notable spread of "Kansas bounty and Kansas cooking" — the couple took up residence on the George Allen farm.[7]

The History of Allen and Woodson Counties, published in 1901, offers a brief but warm sketch of the young family, noting that five children had come to bless their union.[5]

Children and Family Life

Nettie and Charles had five children. Their eldest, Gladys Olive Mentzer, was born on 9 July 1894.[8] Twins Pauline Edith and Paul Emory Mentzer followed on 28 March 1896.[9] Leslie George Mentzer was born on 23 August 1898.[10] The youngest, Herbert Wells Mentzer — whose middle name honored his mother's family — was born on 20 July 1900 in Woodson County.[11]

The 1900 federal census records Nettie at age twenty-five in North Township, Woodson County, as wife of Charles Mentzer. The enumerator noted that she had been married six years and was the mother of four living children, consistent with the birth of Herbert occurring shortly after census day.[12]

Residences Across Two Counties

The Mentzer family moved several times over the decades, though they remained rooted in the landscape of south-central Kansas. Nettie appears in the 1905 Kansas State Census in Neosho Falls, Woodson County,[13] and by 1910 the family had crossed into neighboring Coffey County, where the census records her in Liberty Township as a thirty-seven-year-old wife with five living children and sixteen years of marriage.[14]

The 1915 Kansas State Census places the family in Neosho Township, Coffey County.[15] By 1920 they had returned to Woodson County, settling in Everett Township,[16] where Nettie and Charles remained through the 1920s and into the early 1930s. The latter thirty years of Nettie's life, as her obituary noted, were spent near and in Neosho Falls.[17]

Character and Community

The memorial record prepared at Nettie's death offers a portrait of a woman whose world was centered on home and faith. "Her home and the interest of her children and husband were her main thoughts and prayers," the memorial observes. "With care and efficiency she ruled her home; always holding before her children honor and high aims." She is remembered for finding "beauty, love and joy in doing for others," sparing neither time nor effort in making life comfortable for those around her.[6]

Throughout her adult life Nettie remained a faithful member of the Christian Church. Her obituary records that she united with that congregation as a girl and was still a member at the time of her death.[6]

Death and Burial

Nettie Adell Mentzer died on 9 February 1939 at Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas, four days after her sixty-sixth birthday.[1] She was survived by her husband, Charles O. Mentzer; five children — Mrs. Roy V. Green (Gladys) of Kirwin, Kansas; Mrs. E. O. Briles (Pauline) of Emporia, Kansas; Paul Mentzer of Lyons, Colorado; Leslie Mentzer of Neosho Falls; and Herbert Mentzer of Talala,

Oklahoma; one brother, Will Wells of Milton, Iowa; twelve grandchildren; and numerous nieces, nephews, and friends. A sister and a brother had preceded her in death.[6]

Funeral services were held first at the family home in Neosho Falls, and then at the Christian Church in Yates Center, conducted by Pastor R. C. Harding. Nettie was buried on 12 February 1939 at Yates Center Cemetery, Yates Center, Kansas, beside the community where she had been born sixty-six years before.[18]

A Note on the Evidence

This biography rests on a convergence of primary and derivative sources: vital records, Kansas and federal census returns spanning 1875–1930, county marriage records, published county histories, contemporary newspaper accounts, family Bible records, cemetery transcriptions, and obituaries preserved in the Crawford Family Papers (privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, Kansas). Readers should note that the 1920 census records Nettie's birthplace as Illinois rather than Kansas. Where conflicts exist among sources, the birth certificate and obituary, as original or near-contemporaneous records, have been treated as the more reliable evidence.

Endnotes

1. Kansas State Board of Health, Division of Vital Statistics, death certificate #104 2410 for Nettie Adell Mentzer (9 February 1939), Topeka, Kansas.

2. No author, "The Thurston K. Wells Family," *In the Beginning* (Woodson County Historical Society) 19, no. 73: 8. Also: Crawford Family Papers, Wells Family Bible, copy obtained from Doris Ryan, daughter of Cecile Mentzer Beine; privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, Kansas, 2016.

3. 1875 Kansas State Census, Woodson County, Liberty Township, p. 10, image 6 of 14, household 69, T K Wells; digital image, FamilySearch (www.familysearch.org, viewed December 2018). The census records Nettie as a 2-year-old, consistent with her birth date of February 1873 and the census date of July 1875.

4. 1885 Kansas State Census, Woodson County, Liberty Township, p. 43, image 64 of 96, household 36, T. K. Wells; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com, viewed September 2016); Kansas State Historical Society.

5. Duncan L. Wallace, *History of Allen and Woodson Counties, Kansas* (Iola, Kansas: Iola Register, 1901), pp. 831–832; digital copy, Ancestry.com (viewed 12 June 2021).

6. Mrs. C. O. Mentzer obituary, 1939, Crawford Family Papers; privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, Kansas. Also: Memorial Record of Nettie Adell Mentzer, H. R. Campbell Funeral Home, Crawford Family Papers; saved by Mrs. Pauline Briles and passed down to Marcia Philbrick.

7. Woodson County, Kansas, Marriage Records, vol. E:180, Charles O. Mentzer–Nettie A. Wells, 18 October 1893; "Kansas County Marriages, 1840–1935," FamilySearch (https://familysearch.org, accessed 17 January 2015). Also: "Married," *The Yates Center News* (Yates Center, Kansas), 20 October 1893, p. 2; digital image, Newspapers.com (viewed December 2018).

8. "Mrs. Roy Green Dies," *The Emporia Gazette* (Emporia, Kansas), 3 June 1977, p. 1; Newspapers.com (viewed 23 December 2019).

9. Find a Grave, memorial for Pauline Edith Mentzer Briles (1896–1984), no. 82790232, Maplewood Memorial Lawn Cemetery, Emporia, Lyon County, Kansas; Marcia Philbrick, creator (viewed June 2017). Also: Social Security Administration, "Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936–2007," Paul Emory Mentzer, Ancestry.com (viewed October 2017).

10. "Death – Leslie G. Mentzer," *The Iola Register* (Iola, Kansas), 19 April 1988, p. 6; digital image, Newspapers.com (viewed 28 July 2021).

11. "Local News," *The Yates Center News* (Yates Center, Kansas), 3 August 1900, p. 5; digital image, Newspapers.com (viewed 18 February 2025). Also: Crawford Family Papers, Bible of Charles O. Mentzer, passed down to Marcia Philbrick by Pauline Briles.

12. 1900 U.S. Census, Woodson County, North Township, ED 186, sheet 1A, household 2, Charmes [sic] Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed November 2017); FHL microfilm 1240503.

13. 1905 Kansas State Census, Woodson County, Neosho Falls, p. 12, image 152 of 173, dwelling 72, C. O. Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed March 2016); Kansas State Historical Society.

14. 1910 U.S. Census, Coffey County, Liberty Township, ED 15, sheet 7B, household 124, Charles O Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed November 2017).

15. 1915 Kansas State Census, Coffey County, Neosho Township, p. 11, image 21 of 58, dwelling 91, C. O. Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed March 2016).

16. 1920 U.S. Census, Woodson County, Everett Township, ED 155, sheet 6A, household 116, Charles O Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed November 2017); NARA microfilm T625.

[17] 1925 Kansas State Census, Woodson County, Everett Township, image 13 of 47, C O Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed December 2018). Also: 1930 U.S. Census, Woodson County, Neosho Falls, ED 104-6, sheet 4B, household 126, Charles O Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (viewed November 2017); NARA T626.

[18] BillionGraves, memorial for Nettie A. Mentzer (1873–1939), Yates Center Cemetery, Yates Center, Kansas; created by mcphilbrick, photograph by AK; billiongraves.com (viewed December 2018). Also: Transcriptions from Yates Center Cemetery, Crawford Family Papers, recorded by Michael and Marcia Philbrick; privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, Kansas, 2016. Also: “News of Neosho Falls,” *The Iola Register* (Iola, Kansas), 15 February 1939, p. 5; Newspapers.com (viewed 21 July 2021).

Can AI Help Untangle a Crawford FAN Mystery?

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 13, 2026
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/13/can-ai-help-untangle-a-crawford-fan-mystery/

Do you have a FAN Club that strongly hints at a relationship — but never quite proves it?

My 4th great-grandfather, **James Crawford (#219)**, has been that kind of mystery for years.

Over time, I've collected documentary and DNA evidence that places my James squarely among two other James Crawford families with roots in Garrard County, Kentucky before 1800:

- **James Crawford (#1443)** — husband of Rebecca Anderson
- **James Crawford (#1)** — husband of Martha Knight

For years, I've wondered:
How exactly does my James connect to this Crawford cluster?

Now that yDNA results show that James (#1), who married Martha Knight, was likely a nephew of James (#1443), the question becomes even more focused:

👉 Where does my James (#219) fit into this Crawford family structure?

The Crawford Migration Pattern

Here's what we know:

- James (#1443) married Rebecca Anderson in Virginia and later owned land along Paint Lick Creek in Garrard County, Kentucky before moving to southern Indiana.
- Rebekah Douglas Crawford, widow of John Crawford (d. 1779), owned land in Lincoln/Garrard County.
- Her son, James (#1), married Martha Knight in Lincoln County, Kentucky, then migrated to Preble County, Ohio and later to Indiana.
- My James (#219) married in Garrard County — at the same time these families were present — and later migrated to Preble County, Ohio… where he lived next to James and Martha.

Geographic overlap? Yes.
Shared associates (the Sellers family)? Yes.

DNA matches connecting the lines? Yes.

This is classic FAN Club evidence.

Enter Google Notebook LM

Recently, the administrator of the Facebook group *Ancestors and Algorithms* shared how he uses **Google Notebook LM** to analyze genealogical research and produce shareable content.

You can listen to the full AI-generated podcast here:

🔗 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJXFp63A40o

That got me wondering:

Could I use Notebook LM not just to summarize…
…but to analyze my Crawford mystery?

I exported narrative reports from RootsMagic, gathered my DNA notes, and uploaded the material into Notebook LM.

My prompt:

> *What are the possible relationships between my 4th great grandfather, James Crawford #219 and James Crawford #1 and James Crawford #1443?*

Below is the written analysis generated by Notebook LM.

AI Analysis (Summary Highlights)

Notebook LM identified a central family structure:

- John Crawford (d. 1779) married Rebekah Douglas.
- James (#1443) likely was John's brother.
- James (#1) was likely John and Rebekah's son.

The AI then evaluated my James (#219) in relation to that structure.

Key Points It Identified:

- Strong geographic and migration parallels.
- 1820s "Senior" and "Junior" distinctions in Ohio (age markers, not father/son).
- Land transactions involving the Sellers family.
- Y-DNA placement in haplogroup R-Y88686.
- A 4–6 marker genetic distance at 111 markers between #1 and #219.

Initially, Notebook LM suggested my James (#219) could be either:

- A brother of James (#1), or
- A first cousin

But I pushed back.

Refining the Conclusion

I prompted Notebook LM again:

> Since it is highly unlikely that a family would have two living sons about two years apart with the same name, can you remove the "brother" theory and rewrite the conclusion?

The revised conclusion was much stronger.

Final AI Assessment:

James Crawford (#219) was most likely:

- The nephew of John Crawford (d. 1779)

- The first cousin of James Crawford (#1)
- The son of an unidentified third Crawford brother

The AI cited:

- Naming conventions of the period
- Y-DNA genetic distance (more consistent with first cousins than brothers)
- Continued social and land interactions within the extended Crawford/Douglas/Sellers network

In other words…

The Crawford men migrated as a clan — not randomly.

Why This Matters

Notebook LM didn't magically "solve" my Crawford problem.

But it did something valuable:

- It synthesized documentary evidence.
- It integrated DNA analysis.
- It forced structural clarity.
- It responded to historical logic (naming customs).
- It revised its conclusion when prompted.

In short — it acted like a research assistant who listens.

And for a complex FAN-based problem like this one, that's incredibly useful.

I'm not replacing traditional research.

But I *am* adding AI as another analytical layer.

And in this case, it strengthened the first-cousin hypothesis.

If you have a tight FAN cluster that strongly suggests kinship…
Have you tried asking AI to evaluate the structure?

Sometimes seeing your data synthesized from a different angle makes the migration patterns — and the relationships — much clearer.

From Rapidan to Andersonville

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 14, 2026
andersonville,Civil War,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/14/from-rapidan-to-andersonville/

This biography of Washington Marion Crawford was reconstructed from careful transcriptions of his compiled military service record and his Civil War pension file. Rather than relying on secondary summaries, I worked directly from the original documents — muster rolls, prisoner-of-war memoranda, hospital records, medical certificates, pay accounts, and pension applications. Each page was transcribed in archival form, preserving original wording, dates, and remarks. When read individually, these records appear routine and bureaucratic. But when assembled chronologically, they reveal a powerful narrative arc: enlistment, promotion, capture, imprisonment at Andersonville, medical debility, and final discharge. By weaving together these primary sources, the administrative paperwork becomes something more — a documented story of service, survival, and lasting physical cost.

The Civil War Service of Washington Marion Crawford

When Washington Marion Crawford enlisted on May 3, 1861, he was just twenty-three years old. A farmer by trade and an Indiana native, he joined Capt. McIrvin's company of the Harris Light Cavalry at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. That company would soon become Company H of the 2nd New York Cavalry — a regiment that would serve with the Army of the Potomac through some of the war's hardest campaigns.

At the time of enlistment, Crawford committed to three years of service. He likely had no idea that his military experience would stretch nearly four years — and include fifteen months as a prisoner of war.

Steady Service and Promotion

Crawford's name appears consistently on the company muster rolls throughout 1861 and 1862. There are no remarks of illness, desertion, or disciplinary action — simply the steady record of a cavalryman doing his duty.

By January 1, 1863, his service had earned him promotion to **Sergeant**, elevated "vice Hunter reduced." As a non-commissioned officer, Crawford would have been responsible for maintaining order, overseeing equipment, and helping lead men in the field. It was a position of trust — and one that suggests he had proven himself reliable.

But 1863 would bring a dramatic turn.

Capture on the Rapidan

On September 22, 1863, during operations near White Ford at Liberty Mills on the Rapidan River in Virginia, Sergeant Crawford was captured by Confederate forces.

After that date, the muster rolls change tone:

“Absent.”
“Missing in action since Sept. 22, 1863.”

Within a day he was confined at Richmond, Virginia. Months later, on February 18, 1864, he was transferred south to **Andersonville Prison** in Americus, Georgia — officially known as Camp Sumter.

Andersonville

Andersonville has become one of the most infamous prison camps of the Civil War. Overcrowded and undersupplied, the camp was plagued by disease, exposure, and malnutrition. Though Crawford’s military file does not describe daily conditions, it records the dates that frame his ordeal.

He remained a prisoner from **September 22, 1863 until December 10, 1864** — nearly fifteen months in captivity.

That length of confinement alone tells a story of endurance.

On December 10, 1864, Crawford was paroled at Charleston, South Carolina. One week later, on December 17, he reported to Camp Parole near Annapolis, Maryland, where he was admitted to Hospital Division No. 1.

The descriptive roll taken at this time offers a rare physical snapshot:

- Age: 26
- Height: 5 feet 10 inches
- Light complexion
- Gray eyes
- Red hair
- Occupation: Farmer
- Born in Indiana

The image is vivid — a young Midwestern farmer who had survived one of the war’s harshest prisons.

The Physical Cost of Imprisonment

On December 30, 1864, Crawford was furloughed home to West Lebanon in Warren County, Indiana.

Less than a month later, on January 28, 1865, he was examined by Dr. F. M. Tebbs. The diagnosis was stark:

- Chronic bronchitis
- General debility

The physician certified that Crawford would not be fit for military service for at least thirty days.

Chronic bronchitis was common among Andersonville survivors. Exposure to the elements, weakened immune systems, and poor camp sanitation left many men with lingering respiratory illness. Crawford’s condition was serious enough to warrant formal medical certification and notarization.

The war had not ended for him simply because he had been paroled.

Return and Final Muster-Out

Crawford returned from furlough in March 1865 and reported again to Camp Parole. On April 8, 1865 — just one day before Lee’s surrender at Appomattox — Special Orders directed him to proceed to New York City for final muster-out processing, his term of service having expired.

His official muster-out was effective April 5, 1865.

Pay records show that he received compensation for September and October 1864 — months during which he had still been a prisoner of war. Transportation allowances were recorded. Accounts were certified. The paperwork closed.

But the experience surely did not.

The Arc of His Service

Washington Marion Crawford's military story follows a powerful arc:

Enlisted → Promoted → Captured → Richmond → Andersonville →
Paroled → Hospitalized → Furloughed Home →
Returned → Mustered Out

He served from May 3, 1861 to April 5, 1865.

Nearly fifteen of those months were spent as a prisoner of war.

His file is composed of muster rolls, pay accounts, medical certificates, and hospital records — the quiet language of bureaucracy. Yet within those pages is the story of resilience. A young farmer who rode with the Union cavalry, rose to sergeant, endured captivity at Andersonville, survived chronic illness, and returned home at war's end.

The records do not tell us how he felt when he stepped back onto Indiana soil. They do not describe his physical strength in the years that followed.

But they do preserve something just as important:

He survived.The Civil War Service of Washington Marion Crawford

When Washington Marion Crawford enlisted on May 3, 1861, he was just twenty-three years old. A farmer by trade and an Indiana native, he joined Capt. McIrvin's company of the Harris Light Cavalry at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. That company would soon become Company H of the 2nd New York Cavalry — a regiment that would serve with the Army of the Potomac through some of the war's hardest campaigns.

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He survived.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 15, 2026
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/15/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-193/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again —
Time for some more **Genealogy Fun!!**

Come on, everybody, join in and accept the mission and execute it with precision.

1) How was your genealogy day?
Tell us about it — what genealogy-related activities did you do today, yesterday, or sometime this past week? Researching, summarizing, transcribing, analyzing, writing, organizing, scanning… anything counts!

Unlike Randy, I can't give you an hour-by-hour summary of any genealogy day. However, I can describe what a fairly typical **Saturday in my genealogy world** looks like.

For the past couple of years, one of my genealogy goals has been to **publicly share my research**. In addition to maintaining a public tree, adding sources and memories to the FamilySearch tree, and updating profiles on WikiTree, I also share both my research *and my research process* here on this blog. Because I try to post something every day, I keep a calendar and schedule posts in advance. That means most of what I work on today won't be published for a week or more.

The exception is my **Saturday Night Genealogy Fun** post, which is usually written on Saturday afternoon and scheduled for Sunday morning.

I tend to think of Saturday as my **blogging day**. Many Saturdays begin with reviewing my paper files, looking for items to feature in upcoming *Monday's Diggings* or *Friday Finds* posts.

After that, I often work on content for my **ABC Biography** series, following Randy's prompt. I start with a narrative report from RootsMagic for the selected ancestor. This part often turns into a bit of a "do-over," because I usually discover errors or awkward wording in the sentences or citations that need to be corrected before I go any further.

Once the report is cleaned up, I use ChatGPT to help write a reader-friendly biography and draft the blog post. I also use ChatGPT to create song lyrics about the ancestor. From there, the process expands into several AI tools —

- **Suno.com** for the song
- **Google NotebookLM** for infographics and audio overviews

- **Canva** to create videos from the audio and images
- **YouTube** to host the finished videos for use in another blog post

By the time I finish creating the content for the ABC biography posts, it is usually around **2 p.m. on Saturday afternoon** — which means Randy has posted the new Saturday Night Genealogy Fun challenge. So I switch gears and write this post for Sunday morning.

Unlike Randy, I rarely work late into the evening. I usually wrap up my genealogy and blogging sometime around **4 p.m.**, then shift to my volunteer role as the **worship tech** at our church, where I transfer the media files for Sunday worship to the church computer.

At **5 p.m.**, I join *Church of the Resurrection* online for worship, and after that the evening usually ends quietly — with a bowl of popcorn and whatever book I'm currently reading.

And that's what a typical Saturday in my genealogy world looks like.

How a Wrong Residence Revealed a Database Problem

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 16, 2026
Ancestry,RootsMagic
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/16/error/

I think most of us would admit that there are likely errors in our family trees — especially when those trees are large.

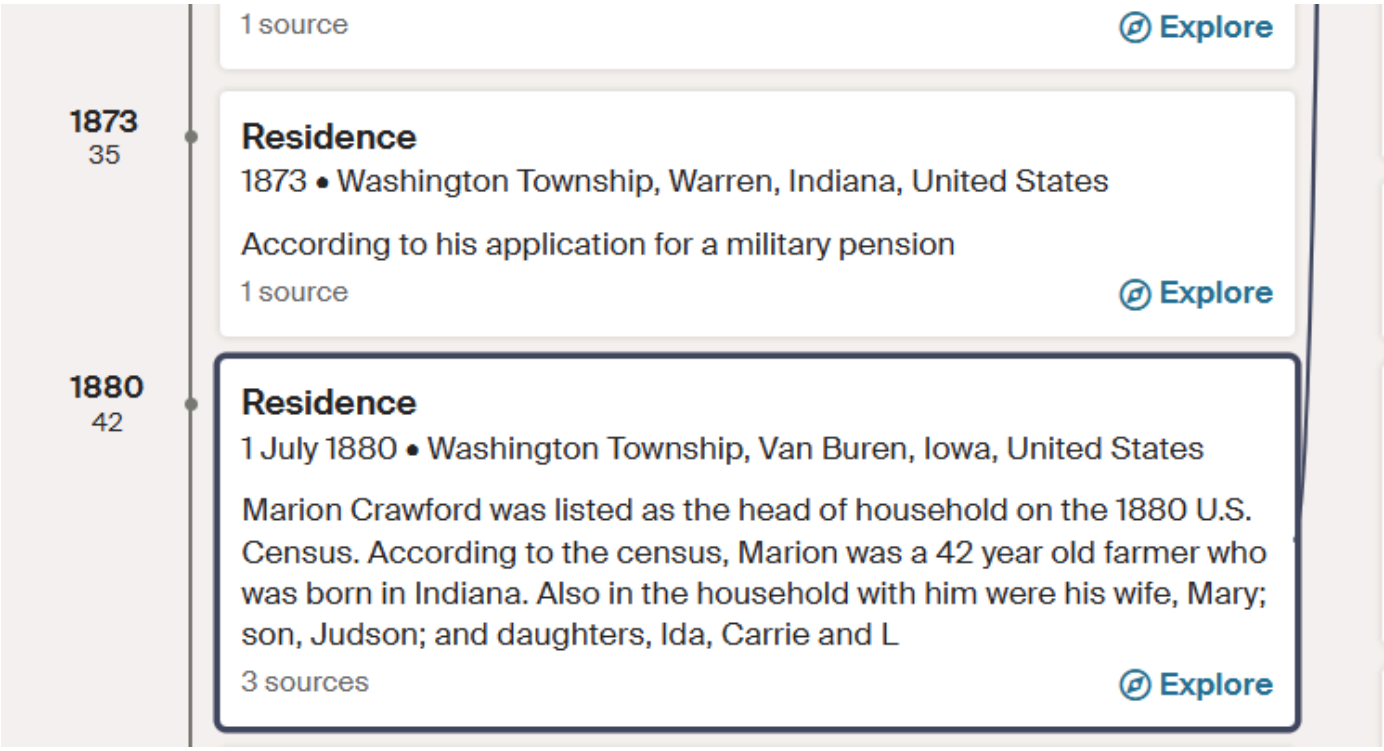
Because I track many of my FAN Club members in my database, my tree is not small. It contains multiple collateral lines and quite a few “floating” branches. Some of those individuals have not been fully researched. In other cases, I may have relied on only one or two sources. That reality alone increases the possibility of error.

However, I do not expect to find errors in the information for my direct ancestors through my second great-grandparents.

So imagine my surprise.

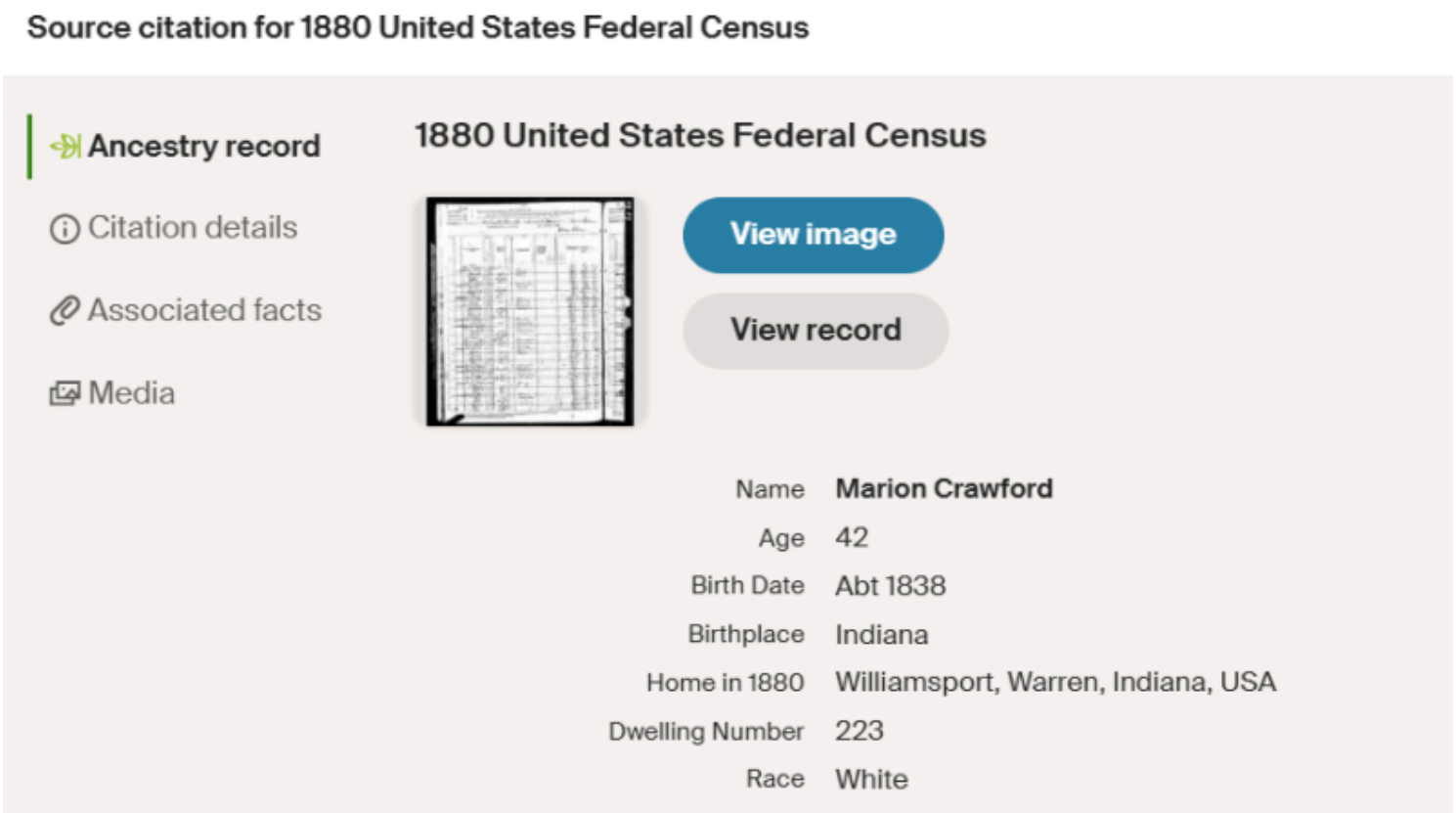
As I was preparing to create AI-generated stories for my 2nd great-grandfather, Washington Marion Crawford, I decided to do a bit of fresh research to see if anything new had surfaced. When I used Ancestry’s search feature, I was not expecting to see references to Iowa sources connected to him.

After adjusting the search filters, I discovered that he was supposedly living in Van Buren County, Iowa.


1 source
Explore
1873
35
Residence
1873 • Washington Township, Warren, Indiana, United States
According to his application for a military pension
1 source
Explore
1880
42
Residence
1 July 1880 • Washington Township, Van Buren, Iowa, United States
Marion Crawford was listed as the head of household on the 1880 U.S. Census. According to the census, Marion was a 42 year old farmer who was born in Indiana. Also in the household with him were his wife, Mary; son, Judson; and daughters, Ida, Carrie and L
3 sources
Explore

That immediately raised a red flag. To my knowledge, this family never lived in Iowa. They moved from Indiana to Kansas. There was no Iowa stop along the way.

So I clicked into the 1880 residence fact attached to him in Ancestry to identify the source. The source was — correctly — the 1880 census for Indiana.



Which led to the obvious question:

How did Iowa get attached to an Indiana census record?

Because I use RootsMagic as my master database and generate my Ancestry tree from it, I suspected the error originated there. The most logical explanation is that I inadvertently merged two similarly named places — likely a Washington Township in Indiana with

Washington Township in Van Buren County, Iowa.

If that happened once, it could have happened multiple times.

Time to investigate.

Using RootsMagic's rule-based groups feature, I created a group containing anyone with an event whose place name included:

- Washington Township
- Van Buren County
- Iowa

The result? Twenty-three individuals.

Thanks to my color-coding system, I could quickly distinguish my Crawford line from my Crandall line — the Crandalls actually did live in Van Buren County, Iowa. That visual separation made it easy to focus only on the five individuals connected to my Crawford research.

For each of those five:

- I checked the original source.
- Verified that the record was indeed from Indiana.
- Corrected the place name in RootsMagic.

Once the corrections were made, I used TreeShare to push the updated information back to Ancestry.

Problem fixed — and likely prevented from spreading further.

This experience reminded me why Thomas MacEntee's "Do-Over" concept is not a one-and-done event. A do-over is a mindset. It's a commitment to continual review, re-evaluation, and refinement.

Even well-researched lines deserve periodic scrutiny.

And I'm grateful that RootsMagic's rule-based groups made it possible to locate these incorrect place names quickly. Without that tool, I might have corrected Washington Marion Crawford — and never discovered the other four errors quietly hiding in my database.

Sometimes the real value of our software isn't data entry.

It's quality control.

Am I Irish?

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 17, 2026
DNA,IRISH
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/17/am-i-irish-2/

Every March, as St. Patrick's Day approaches, I see posts in the Kennedy Facebook group celebrating our "Irish heritage." After all, there's a Kennedy in my tree — so surely that makes me Irish, right?

Maybe.

But for years, I've suspected that my Kennedy line might actually be Scottish rather than traditionally Irish. Surnames can travel, borders shift, and history is rarely as simple as a holiday slogan.

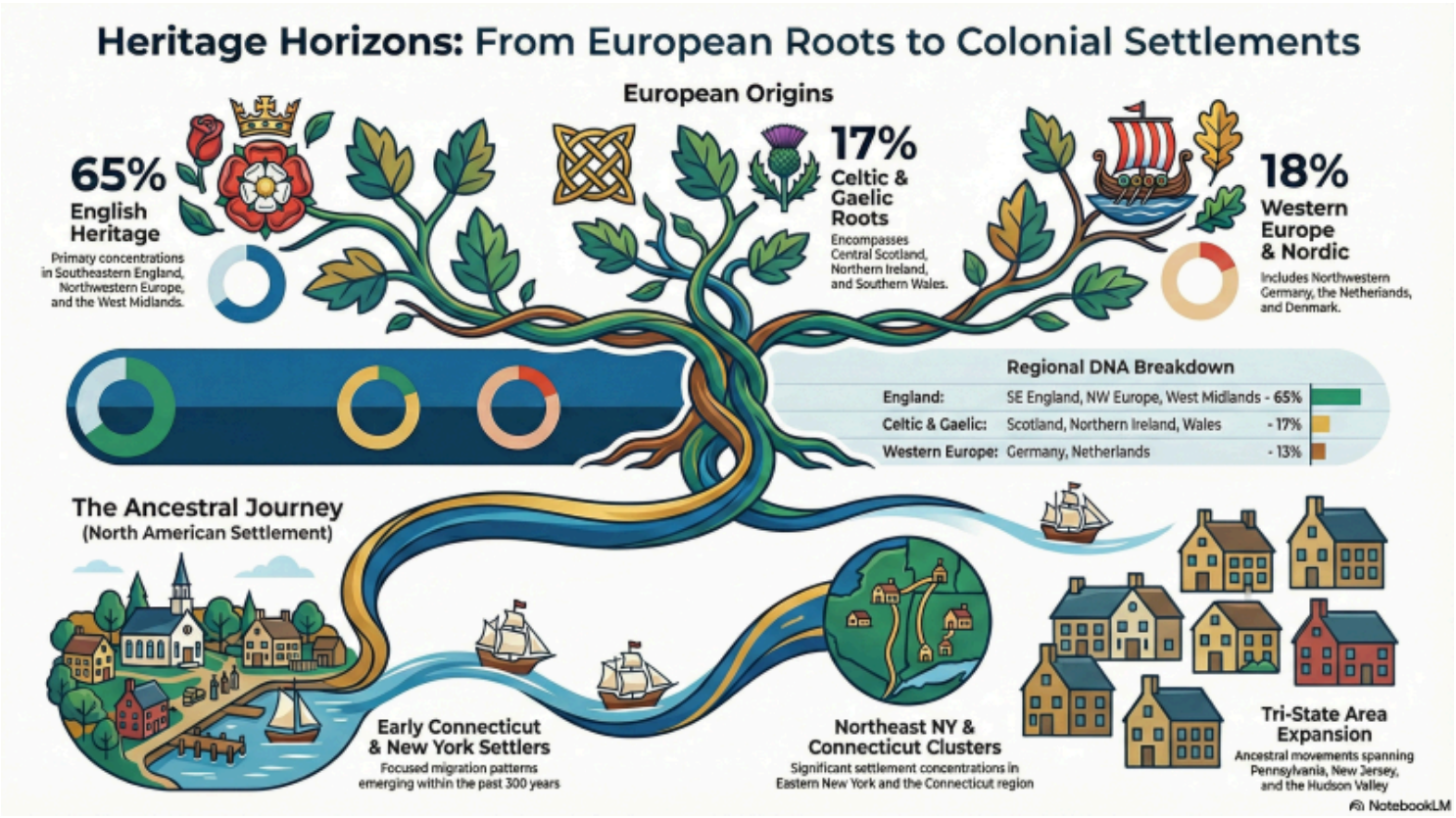
Recently, Randy Seaver highlighted Heidi Buck's post in the *Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence* Facebook group about using Google Notebook LM to transform DNA ethnicity results into infographics. That caught my attention immediately. What better way to test my long-held suspicion than to visually compare the DNA results for myself and my two brothers?

So I took screenshots of our AncestryDNA ethnicity estimates and fed them into Google Notebook LM. The result? Clean, easy-to-read infographics — one for each of us and one comparing all three.

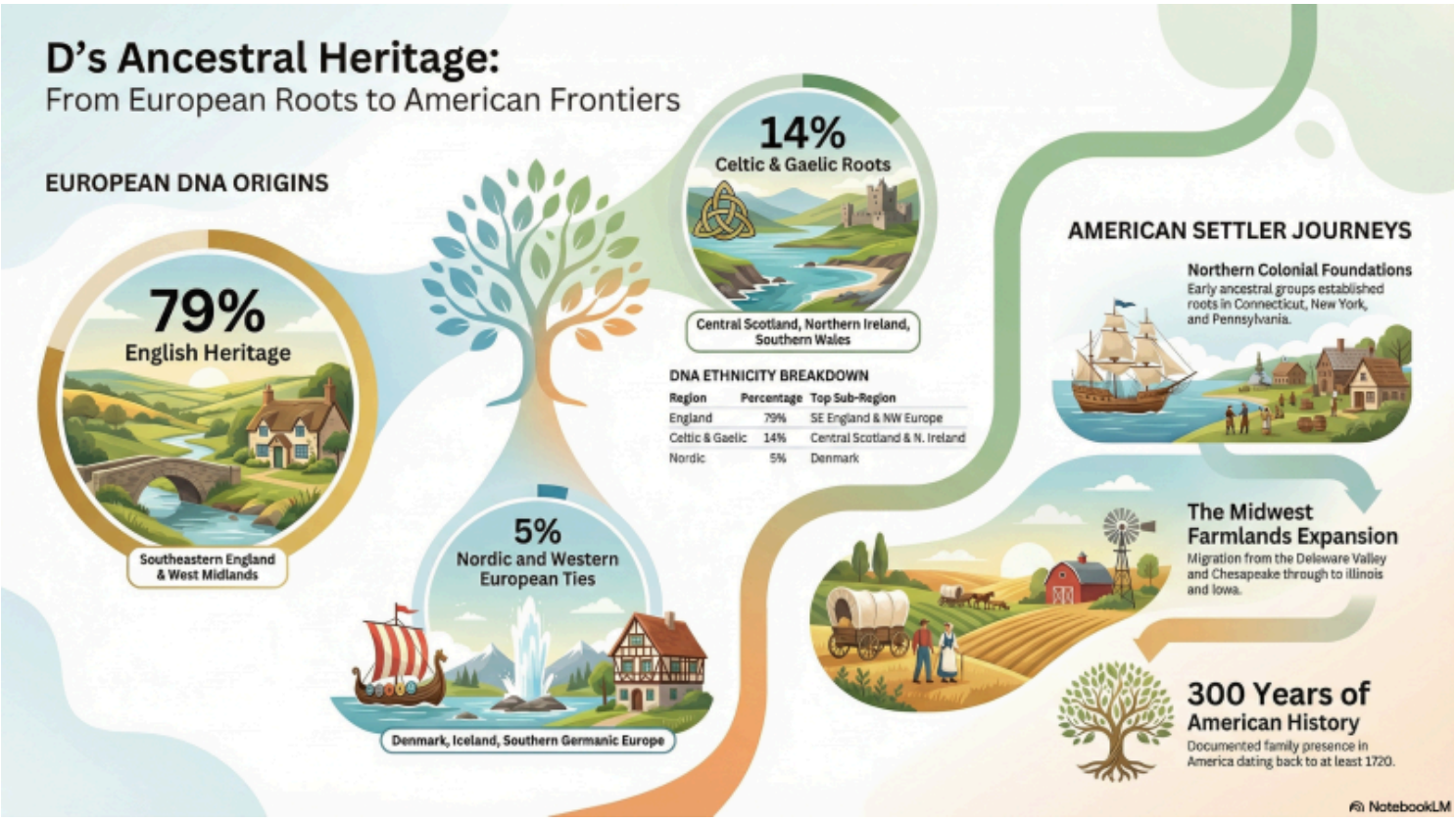
The most interesting takeaway: none of us show "Ireland" as a standalone ethnicity. Our Irish-associated results fall under **Northern Ireland and Scotland**. That certainly doesn't eliminate Irish roots — history in Ulster is complex — but it does make the case for strong Scottish connections.

So this St. Patrick's Day, I may not be claiming straight-from-Dublin ancestry… but I'll still wear green and celebrate. After all, genealogy is about embracing the full story — even when it's more nuanced than we expected.

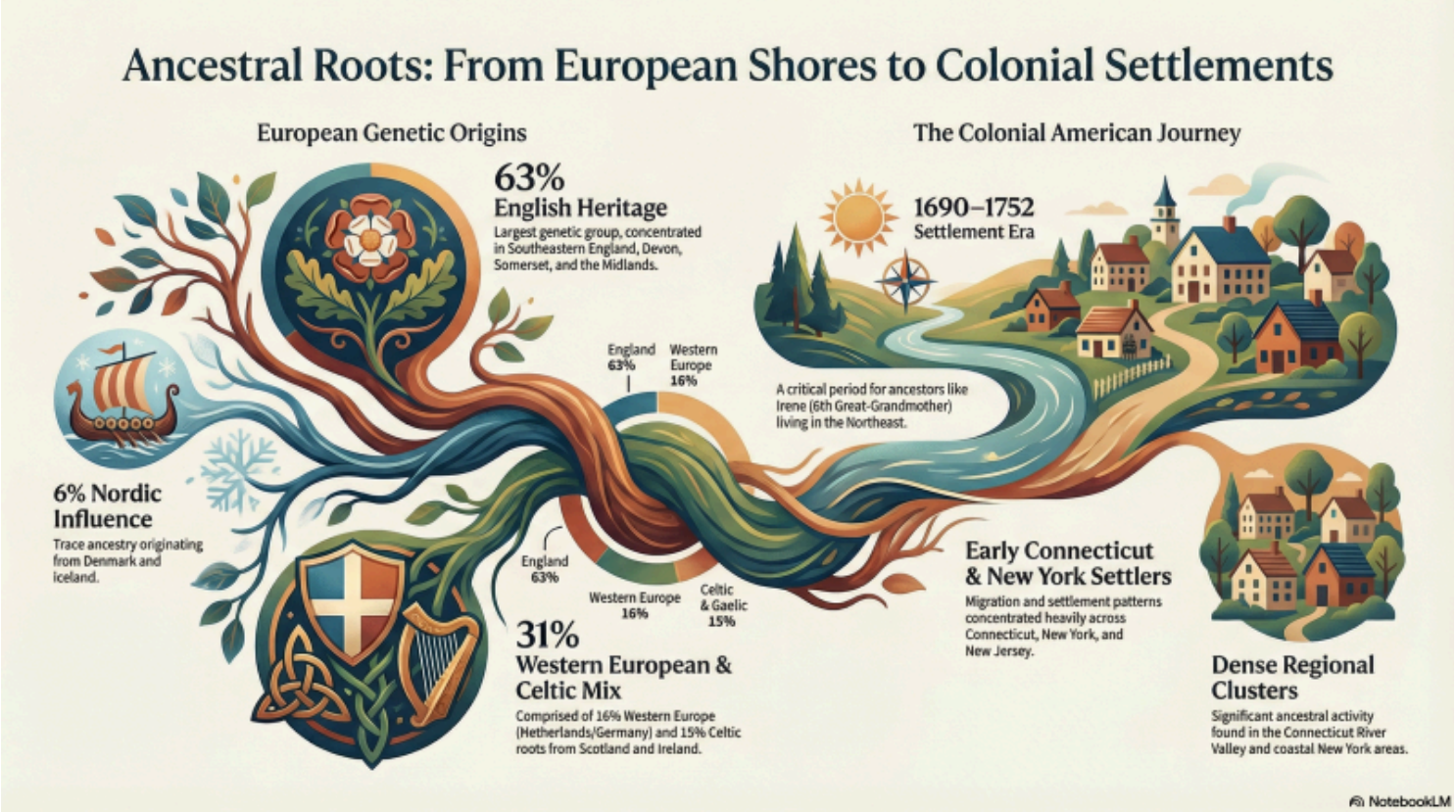
My Ancestral Origins


Heritage Horizons: From European Roots to Colonial Settlements
European Origins
65%
English Heritage
Primary concentrations in Southeastern England, Northwestern Europe, and the West Midlands.
17%
Celtic & Gaelic Roots
Encompasses Central Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Southern Wales.
18%
Western Europe & Nordic
Includes Northwestern Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark.
Regional DNA Breakdown
England: SE England, NW Europe, West Midlands - 65%
Celtic & Gaelic: Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales - 17%
Western Europe: Germany, Netherlands - 13%
The Ancestral Journey
(North American Settlement)
Early Connecticut & New York Settlers
Focused migration patterns emerging within the past 300 years
Northeast NY & Connecticut Clusters
Significant settlement concentrations in Eastern New York and the Connecticut region
Tri-State Area Expansion
Ancestral movements spanning Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and the Hudson Valley
NotebookLM

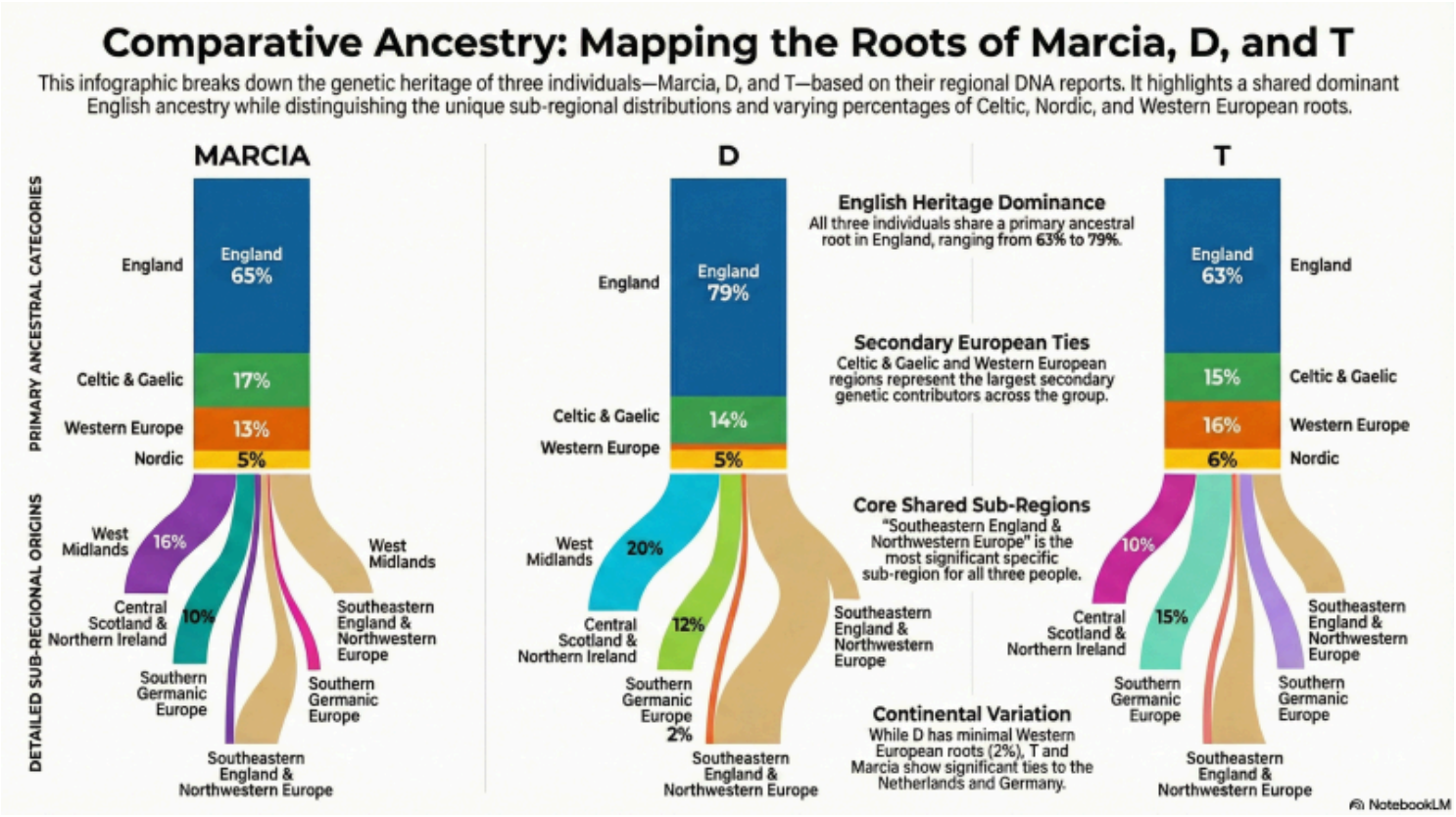
My Brother's Ancestral Origins


D's Ancestral Heritage:
From European Roots to American Frontiers
EUROPEAN DNA ORIGINS
79%
English Heritage
Southeastern England & West Midlands
14%
Celtic & Gaelic Roots
Central Scotland, Northern Ireland, Southern Wales
5%
Nordic and Western European Ties
Denmark, Iceland, Southern Germanic Europe
DNA ETHNICITY BREAKDOWN
Region | Percentage | Top Sub-Region
England | 79% | SE England & NW Europe
Celtic & Gaelic | 14% | Central Scotland & N. Ireland
Nordic | 5% | Denmark
AMERICAN SETTLER JOURNEYS
Northern Colonial Foundations
Early ancestral groups established roots in Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania.
The Midwest Farmlands Expansion
Migration from the Delaware Valley and Chesapeake through to Illinois and Iowa.
300 Years of American History
Documented family presence in America dating back to at least 1720.
NotebookLM

My Other Brother's Ancestral Origins


Ancestral Roots: From European Shores to Colonial Settlements
European Genetic Origins
The Colonial American Journey
63%
English Heritage
Largest genetic group, concentrated in Southeastern England, Devon, Somerset, and the Midlands.
England 63%
Western Europe 16%
1690–1752
Settlement Era
A critical period for ancestors like Irene (6th Great-Grandmother) living in the Northeast.
6% Nordic Influence
Trace ancestry originating from Denmark and Iceland.
England 63%
Western Europe 16%
Celtic & Gaelic 15%
31%
Western European & Celtic Mix
Comprised of 16% Western Europe (Hetherlands/Germany) and 15% Celtic roots from Scotland and Ireland.
Early Connecticut & New York Settlers
Migration and settlement patterns concentrated heavily across Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey.
Dense Regional Clusters
Significant ancestral activity found in the Connecticut River Valley and coastal New York areas.
NotebookLM

Comparison


Comparative Ancestry: Mapping the Roots of Marcia, D, and T
This infographic breaks down the genetic heritage of three individuals—Marcia, D, and T—based on their regional DNA reports. It highlights a shared dominant English ancestry while distinguishing the unique sub-regional distributions and varying percentages of Celtic, Nordic, and Western European roots.
MARCIA
D
T
PRIMARY ANCESTRAL CATEGORIES
DETAILED SUB-REGIONAL ORIGINS
England 65%
Celtic & Gaelic 17%
Western Europe 13%
Nordic 5%
England 79%
Celtic & Gaelic 14%
Western Europe 5%
England 63%
Celtic & Gaelic 15%
Western Europe 16%
Nordic 6%
West Midlands 16%
Central Scotland & Northern Ireland 10%
Southern Germanic Europe
Southeastern England & Northwestern Europe
West Midlands 20%
Central Scotland & Northern Ireland 12%
Southern Germanic Europe 2%
Southeastern England & Northwestern Europe
West Midlands 10%
Central Scotland & Northern Ireland 15%
Southern Germanic Europe
Southeastern England & Northwestern Europe
English Heritage Dominance
All three individuals share a primary ancestral root in England, ranging from 63% to 79%.
Secondary European Ties
Celtic & Gaelic and Western European regions represent the largest secondary genetic contributors across the group.
Core Shared Sub-Regions
"Southeastern England & Northwestern Europe" is the most significant specific sub-region for all three people.
Continental Variation
While D has minimal Western European roots (2%), T and Marcia show significant ties to the Netherlands and Germany.
NotebookLM

Going Sideways?

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 18, 2026
Anderson,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/18/going-sideways/

When Sideways Research Changes Direction

Have you ever intentionally used the "Sideways Search Method" in your genealogy?

I've certainly researched siblings, in-laws, and neighbors before — but I never consciously labeled it "sideways searching." That changed when I recently read a blog post about researching laterally instead of climbing endlessly up a single ancestral line.

As I read, I couldn't help thinking about my ongoing Crawford brick wall.

For years, I have tried to untangle early Virginia Crawford families — often with very little clarity about how the various James, John, and William Crawfords connect. At one point, I was combing Virginia records with only partial understanding of the family structure. I was searching vertically — trying to push one direct line further back — without fully understanding the surrounding family network.

So I did something different.

Instead of pushing backward, I returned to a line I *do* know: James Crawford, who married Rebecca Anderson (widow Maxwell). I decided to update and re-evaluate everything connected to that couple.

That decision took me sideways.

The Maxwell Detour

I remembered that Rebecca Anderson Maxwell's family was discussed in a Maxwell genealogy, so I located a digital copy on Archive.org. I expected perhaps a few paragraphs.

Instead, I found multiple pages devoted to **Rev. James Anderson of Donegal**.

That discovery may prove far more important to my Crawford research than I first realized.

Because if my Crawfords were interacting with, marrying into, or migrating alongside Anderson-connected families, then understanding the Anderson timeline may illuminate when — and how — my Crawford ancestors moved.

So I used ChatGPT to extract the information about Rev. James Anderson and create a timeline.

While the timeline documents *his* life, it may provide crucial context for the immigration and migration patterns of my Crawford families.

Timeline of Rev. James Anderson (1678–1740)

1678 – 17 November
Born in Scotland.

1708 – 17 November
Ordained by the Irvine Presbytery, Scotland.

1709 – 22 April
Arrived in America; settled at New Castle.

1712/13 – February
Married Suit Garland.

1714
Donegal Church organized in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

1722
Donegal Church building erected.

1726 – 24 September
Called to Donegal Church.

1727 – August
Installed as pastor.

1732 – 11 October
Donegal Presbytery organized.

1737 – September
Petition from Beverly Manor (Shenandoah Valley, Virginia) requesting Presbyterian services.

1738 – April
Traveled to Virginia with petition to Governor Gooch regarding religious protection.

1739/1740 – Spring
Preached in the Shenandoah Valley (Staunton area).

1740 – 4 June
Two hundred acres deeded to Rev. James Anderson for church use.

1740 – 16 July
Died in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Rev. James Anderson:
Pioneer of American Presbyterianism (1678–1740)
1727
1739
From Scotland to the Colonies:
Born in Scotland in 1678 and ordained in 1708, Anderson arrived in America in 1709.
Architect of Church Structure:
Participated in the 1716 Philadelphia meeting to organize the first subordinate presbyteries.
Leadership at Donegal Church:
Installed as pastor in 1727, leading one of colonial America's most influential congregations.
Champion of Religious Liberty:
Petitioned Virginia's Governor in 1738 to protect the religious freedom of Presbyterian settlers.
The First Shenandoah Sermon:
Traditionally credited with preaching the first Presbyterian sermon in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley (1739).
Church Planting:
Founded the Donegal Presbytery and expanded ministry into Virginia.
Civic Advocacy:
Secured religious protections for settlers via official government petitions.
Regional Legacy:
Established the first Presbyterian presence in the Shenandoah Valley.
NotebookLM

Why This Timeline Matters for My Crawford Research

Here's where the sideways search becomes powerful.

The Shenandoah Valley petition of 1737 tells us Presbyterian settlers were already firmly established in that region by the late 1730s.

If my Crawford ancestors were associated with Andersons, Maxwells, or the Donegal congregation:

- Did they migrate with this Scotch-Irish movement?
- Were they in Pennsylvania first?
- Did they follow the church network south into Virginia?
- Did they then continue west into Kentucky?

The Anderson timeline outlines a migration corridor:
Scotland → Pennsylvania (Donegal) → Shenandoah Valley → Kentucky.

That same corridor appears repeatedly in early Crawford research.

Instead of asking only, *"Who were my Crawfords?"* I may need to ask:

- Which Presbyterian networks were they attached to?
- Were they part of the Donegal migration wave?
- Were they neighbors in Pennsylvania before appearing in Virginia?
- Did church affiliations map their movements?

Sideways research doesn't just expand the family tree — it clarifies the migration pattern.

And in early Kentucky research, migration patterns are often the key.

Why We Struggle

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 19, 2026
Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/19/why-we-struggle/

When Two James Crawfords Die in the Same Year…

Do you struggle with “same name” issues in your family tree?

I certainly do. And the name that causes me the most grief is **James Crawford**.

At one point in my early research, I was trying to sort out *four* different men named James Crawford in late 18th-century Kentucky:

- **James Crawford**, who married **Sally Duggins** in 1799, Garrard County, Kentucky (my line)
- **James Crawford**, who married **Martha Knight** in 1792, Lincoln County, Kentucky
- **James Crawford**, who owned land along Paint Lick Creek in Garrard County, Kentucky — husband of **Rebecca Anderson**, daughter of John Anderson
- **Rev. James Crawford**, pastor of Walnut Hill Church near Lexington, identified as a son of Alexander Crawford

At first glance, it seemed manageable. Surely, geography and spouses would keep them straight.

But Crawford research has taught me one thing: nothing is ever that simple.

The Ohio River Complication

The two younger James Crawfords (Duggins and Knight) created confusion because they later owned adjoining land in Preble County, Ohio. Shared migration paths, proximity, and similar naming patterns made separating them challenging.

The elder James Crawford — husband of Rebecca Anderson — should have been easier. He migrated from Garrard County, Kentucky, to **Jefferson County, Indiana**, settling north of the Ohio River.

That move ought to have drawn a clean geographic line.

Instead, it created another problem.

While reviewing online trees and compiled sources, I repeatedly saw references placing this James in **Fleming County, Kentucky** — south of the Ohio River. That led me to yet another James Crawford: one married to a woman surnamed **VanSandt**.

Here's where it becomes especially interesting:

- The James Crawford of Jefferson County, Indiana, and
- The James Crawford of Fleming County, Kentucky

were reportedly born in the same year… and died in the same year.

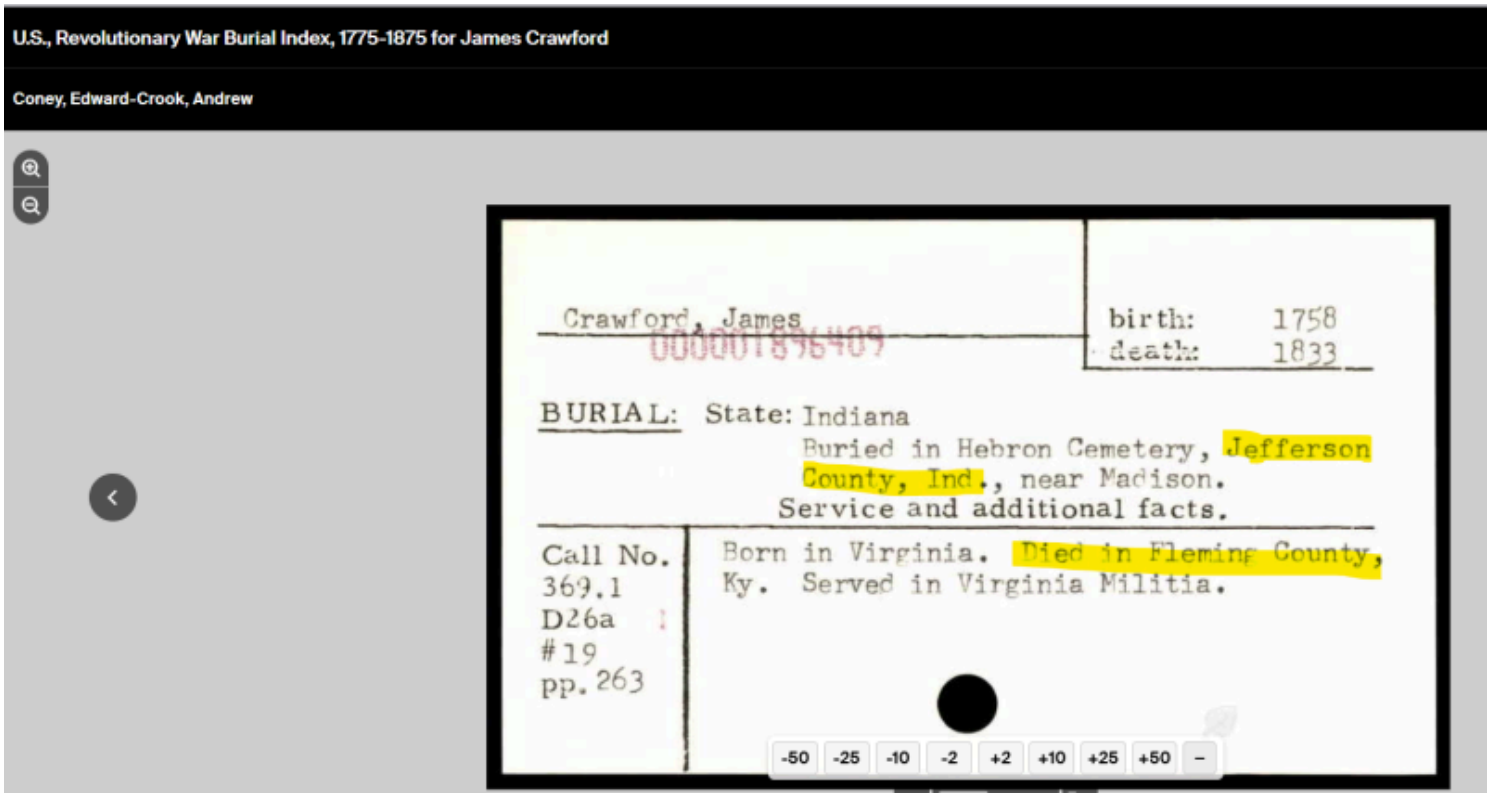
Same name. Same birth year. Same death year.
Different wives. Different land. Different sides of the Ohio River.

A Burial Across the River?

For a time, their **Find A Grave** memorials appeared to have them buried on opposite sides of the Ohio River from where they actually lived — suggesting the two men had been conflated.

Those memorials have since been corrected.

However, I recently encountered another record that still places the **Fleming County, Kentucky** James Crawford — who lived south of the river — buried across the Ohio River in **Jefferson County, Indiana**, where the Anderson-married James resided.


U.S., Revolutionary War Burial Index, 1775-1875 for James Crawford
Coney, Edward-Crook, Andrew
Crawford, James
birth: 1758
death: 1833
BURIAL: State: Indiana
Buried in Hebron Cemetery, Jefferson County, Ind., near Madison.
Service and additional facts.
Call No. 369.1 D26a #19 pp. 263
Born in Virginia. Died in Fleming County, Ky. Served in Virginia Militia.
-50 -25 -10 -2 +2 +10 +25 +50 –

Is this a simple clerical mistake?
A misreading of county boundaries?
Or lingering confusion from earlier conflation of the two men?

Why This Matters

For genealogists, identical names alone aren't the problem. It's when identical names are paired with identical life spans that the real trouble begins.

But spouses, land transactions, tax rolls, church affiliations, migration patterns, and FAN-club associations still matter. Geography still matters. The Ohio River was a boundary — politically and socially — but it was also a corridor of migration.

The key question isn't whether a James Crawford crossed the river.

The key question is **which James did** — and whether a burial location aligns with documented residence and land ownership.

For now, the evidence still supports two distinct men:

- One rooted in **Fleming County, Kentucky**

- One who removed to **Jefferson County, Indiana**

But when a source places the Kentucky James buried in Indiana, it’s a reminder that even “fixed” records require scrutiny.

Thus, the Crawford struggle continues.

When a FamilySearch 'Reason Statement' becomes a Proof Argument

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 20, 2026
Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/20/proof-argument-2/

Have you edited a family relationship on the FamilySearch Family Tree? If so, have you ever considered that the *reason* you provide for making the change is actually a **mini proof argument**?

As I worked through my **fourth cousins on Relatives at RootsTech**, I encountered several "relatives" who descended from **Sarah Smith**, but not from her husband **James Crawford**. Their line went back to **Alexander McGowan and his wife, Mary Polly Crawford**.

At first glance, it would be easy to assume that **Mary Polly Crawford**, wife of Alexander McGowan, was a daughter of **Sarah Smith Crawford**. However, my research on **Sarah Smith Duggins Crawford** suggested that this assumption was unlikely.

While I could simply disconnect **Mary Polly Crawford** from **Sarah Smith** on the FamilySearch tree, I wanted the explanation I provided to clearly justify the change. In other words, I wanted my *reason statement* to summarize the evidence behind the decision.

Reviewing my records for **Sarah Smith Duggins Crawford and James Crawford**, I drafted the following argument based on the sources currently available.

Evidence Regarding Sarah Smith and Mary Polly Crawford

Mary Polly Crawford McGowan's profile indicates she was born in **1788**, and her **1809 marriage** supports a birth in the late 1780s.

On FamilySearch, **Mary Polly Crawford (L71Z-QL9)** is currently attached as a daughter of **Sarah Smith (LH8Y-HB9)**. However, this particular Sarah Smith was **married to Alexander Duggins in 1788**. Any child born to her at that time would have been born with the **Duggins surname**, not Crawford. Known children of Sarah Smith and Alexander Duggins include **Henry Duggins** and **William A. Duggins**.

In **1799 in Garrard County, Kentucky**, the widow **Sarah Duggins married James Crawford**. The Crawford family later migrated to **Preble County, Ohio**, where James and Salley lived for the remainder of their lives.

Records from Preble County identify members of this Crawford family:

- **Polly Crawford married John Stoner in 1821 in Preble County, Ohio.**

- In **1822**, **James and Salley Crawford sold land to William Duggins**, confirming the continuing connection between the Duggins and Crawford families.
- **James Crawford's 1851 will** names two granddaughters: **Mary Ann Wikle (wife of Jacob Wikel)** and **Martha Jane Stoner**.
  Mary Ann Stoner later married **Jonathan Sheffer in 1862**.

Autosomal DNA also supports the documented relationships:

- Descendants of **Nelson Crawford** (son of James and Salley Crawford) share DNA with descendants of **Henry and William Duggins**, supporting the Duggins–Crawford connection.
- Descendants of **Nelson Crawford** also share DNA with descendants of **Mary Polly Crawford Stoner**, further supporting her placement in the James and Salley Crawford family.

At present, **no documentary or DNA evidence connects Sarah (Salley) Smith Duggins Crawford to Mary Polly Crawford McGowan**, wife of Alexander McGowan.

Using AI to Refine the Argument

Wanting to improve my wording, I asked ChatGPT to help refine my explanation. I provided the following prompt:

> *The FamilySearch tree shows Sarah Smith (LH8Y-HB9) as the mother of Mary Polly Crawford (L71Z-QL9), wife of Alexander McGowan, and Mary Polly Crawford (MS7M-1GT), wife of John Stoner. I plan to disconnect Sarah Smith from Mary Polly Crawford McGowan on the FamilySearch tree. When I do that, I need to provide reasons why…*

ChatGPT helped organize my notes into a clearer **proof-style argument** explaining why the relationship was unlikely.

However, ChatGPT also suggested that FamilySearch users are more likely to read a **shorter explanation**. The following two-sentence version fit perfectly in the "Reason This Information Is Correct" box.

> **Mary Polly Crawford McGowan (b. 1788) is currently attached as a daughter of Sarah (Salley) Smith. However, Sarah Smith married Alexander Duggins in 1788, so a child born at that time would have had the Duggins surname, not Crawford. Sarah later married James Crawford in 1799, and records and DNA evidence connect her to the Crawford family of Preble County, Ohio (including Polly Crawford Stoner), but no evidence connects her to Mary Polly Crawford McGowan. Therefore, this parent-child relationship appears unsupported and has been removed pending evidence.**

Using this shortened version, I disconnected **Mary Polly Crawford McGowan** from **Sarah Smith** on the FamilySearch tree.

Hopefully, descendants of **Alexander McGowan and Mary Polly Crawford** will review the evidence and accept this change. If new records emerge that connect her to this family, the relationship can always be reconsidered.

In the meantime, this experience reminded me that **even a short "reason statement" on FamilySearch can function as a concise genealogical proof argument.**

From Enlistment to Andersonville

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 21, 2026
andersonville,Civil War,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/21/from-enlistment-to-andersonville/

The Military and POW Timeline of Washington Marion Crawford

When we read a Civil War pension file or compiled military service record page by page, it can feel like we're looking at fragments — muster rolls, pay vouchers, hospital records, prisoner-of-war memoranda. Each document stands alone.

But when those documents are transcribed, arranged chronologically, and viewed together, something powerful happens.

They become a story.

The infographic below was created from careful transcriptions of Washington Marion Crawford's compiled military service record and his pension file. Every date comes directly from those original records — enlistment rolls, promotion notations, capture reports, prisoner transfers, hospital admissions, and muster-out documentation.

Rather than summarizing his service in a few sentences, I wanted to see it unfold visually — the steady service, the sudden capture, the long months of imprisonment, the parole, the medical examination, and finally the journey toward discharge.

The Timeline at a Glance

Washington Marion Crawford:

- **Enlisted:** May 3, 1861
- **Promoted to Sergeant:** January 1, 1863
- **Captured:** September 22, 1863 (White Ford / Liberty Mills, Virginia)
- **Imprisoned:** Richmond → Andersonville → Charleston
- **Paroled:** December 10, 1864
- **Hospitalized:** Camp Parole, Annapolis
- **Diagnosed:** Chronic bronchitis and general debility
- **Mustered Out:** April 5, 1865

Nearly fifteen months of his four-year service were spent as a prisoner of war.

The military file records him first as "Absent" and then as "Missing in action since Sept. 22, 1863." But the POW records fill in the rest — confinement, parole, hospital admission, furlough home to Indiana, and eventual return for final processing.

Why This Timeline Matters

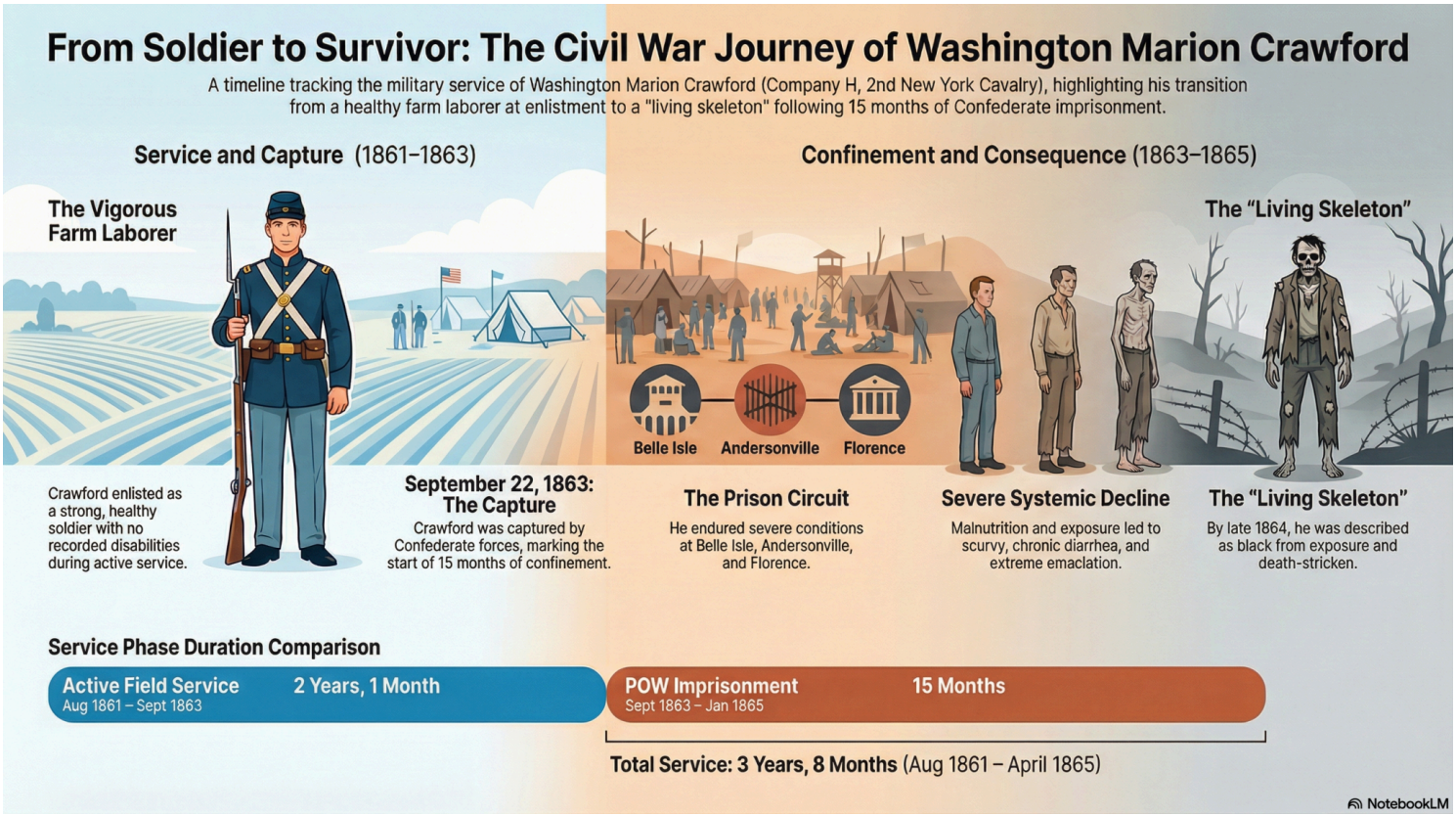
Military records often feel administrative. They list dates. They record pay. They document absence.

But arranged chronologically, those entries reveal the arc of a life interrupted by war.

Enlistment.
Promotion.
Capture.
Andersonville.
Hospital.
Home.
Muster-out.

The paperwork closes in April 1865.

The story does not.


From Soldier to Survivor: The Civil War Journey of Washington Marion Crawford
A timeline tracking the military service of Washington Marion Crawford (Company H, 2nd New York Cavalry), highlighting his transition from a healthy farm laborer at enlistment to a "living skeleton" following 15 months of Confederate imprisonment.
Service and Capture (1861–1863)
Confinement and Consequence (1863–1865)
The Vigorous Farm Laborer
Crawford enlisted as a strong, healthy soldier with no recorded disabilities during active service.
September 22, 1863: The Capture
Crawford was captured by Confederate forces, marking the start of 15 months of confinement.
Belle Isle
Andersonville
Florence
The Prison Circuit
He endured severe conditions at Belle Isle, Andersonville, and Florence.
Severe Systemic Decline
Malnutrition and exposure led to scurvy, chronic diarrhea, and extreme emaciation.
The "Living Skeleton"
The "Living Skeleton"
By late 1864, he was described as black from exposure and death-stricken.
Service Phase Duration Comparison
Active Field Service
Aug 1861 – Sept 1863
2 Years, 1 Month
POW Imprisonment
Sept 1863 – Jan 1865
15 Months
Total Service: 3 Years, 8 Months (Aug 1861 – April 1865)
NotebookLM

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 22, 2026
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/22/genealogy-fun-6/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again —

Time for some more Genealogy Fun!!

Come on, everybody, join in and accept the mission and execute it with precision.

1) March 21 is National Memory Day. How can we celebrate and participate in the day?

When it comes to family history, my grandmothers were the true *memory keepers* in our family. Thanks to their efforts, I inherited a wide variety of family information, photographs, and stories. Those memories became the foundation of my genealogy journey. While it would have been easy to simply create notebooks about my ancestors and put them on a shelf, that has never been my ultimate goal.

I began my genealogy research in the days when one relied on family group sheets, pedigree charts, and letters exchanged through the mail with other researchers. From the very beginning, I felt that the information my grandmothers preserved should be shared, not stored away.

Before the days of the Internet, I created printed reports for various family lines and donated them to local genealogy and historical societies where those families lived. In this way, the memories of my ancestors could be available to others who might be searching for the same connections.

During the early years of online genealogy, I submitted my great-grandmother's poetry collection to the Kansas Memory Project. Because of that effort, her poems are now preserved digitally and available to all of her descendants.

In the early days of the World Wide Web, I created a Geocities website called **Heartland Genealogy**. Much of the information that now appears on the *Untangling James Crawford* page on this blog can be traced back to that original website. Even then, my goal was the same — to make sure the memories I had inherited would not be lost.

For many years my genealogy software of choice was *The Master Genealogist*. Using John Cardinal's **Second Site**, I published my genealogy online so that others could access the information. When support for The Master Genealogist ended, I converted to RootsMagic. Today, instead of Second Site, I share my research through my public tree on Ancestry.

Knowing that my notebooks and files may not be kept by the next generation, I have also uploaded many of the family photographs I inherited to the **Memories** pages on the FamilySearch tree (Josie Hammond Crawford's Memories page). By doing this, those images are preserved in more than one place and are available to anyone connected to the family.

Now, with the help of a variety of AI tools, I am finding new ways to preserve and share family memories. Biographies, timelines, audio overviews, songs, and videos allow me to tell the stories of my ancestors in ways that go far beyond what my grandmothers could have imagined.

All of these efforts — from handwritten group sheets to online trees to AI-generated stories — have the same purpose:

to preserve the memories of those who came before me, and to make sure those memories will not be forgotten.

Monday's Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 23, 2026
Briles,Randolph County, NC
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/23/mondays-diggings-27/

Two Chimneys and a Plantation Memory

Do you have photographs of your ancestors' homes — or at least what remains of them?

Today's find in my **BRILES** folder is a photograph my parents brought back from a research trip to Randolph County, North Carolina, where my Briles ancestors once lived.

On the back of the photo, in my parents' handwriting, it reads:

> *Remains of old house on former Briles plantation*
> *Randolph Co. NC*

The image itself is simple — just two brick chimneys standing in the middle of trees. No house. No porch. No family gathered in front. Just the silent remains.

And yet, those two chimneys speak volumes.

They represent a structure that once sheltered generations. Meals were cooked there. Children were raised there. Decisions were made there that shaped the lives of descendants — including me.

I'm especially grateful that my parents didn't just take the photograph and move on. They visited with local residents and genealogists to determine the location of the former Briles plantation. They asked questions. They listened. They documented what they learned.

Because of their efforts, I don't just have a name on a page — I have a place.

Even if all that remains are two chimneys standing quietly among the trees.

When Records Begin to Speak

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 24, 2026
Civil War,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/24/when-records-begin-to-speak/

From Soldier to Survivor: The Civil War Journey of Washington Marion Crawford
A timeline tracking the military service of Washington Marion Crawford (Company H, 2nd New York Cavalry), highlighting his transition from a healthy farm laborer at enlistment to a "living skeleton" following 15 months of Confederate imprisonment.
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15 Months
Total Service: 3 Years, 8 Months (Aug 1861 – April 1865)
NotebookLM

After transcribing the Civil War military and pension records of Washington Marion Crawford, I created a timeline of his service in Company H of the 2nd New York Cavalry. The dates alone told a powerful story: enlistment in 1861, promotion to sergeant in 1863, capture on the Rapidan River, and nearly fifteen months as a prisoner of war that included confinement at Andersonville.

But timelines can only show so much.

To explore the story more deeply, I uploaded the timeline and supporting material into **Google Notebook LM** and asked it to create an **audio overview** of Crawford's military experience. The result was a fascinating narrative interpretation of the records — one that highlights something the documents themselves quietly reveal: how quickly his health deteriorated during his imprisonment.

The prisoner-of-war memoranda, hospital records, and later pension testimony all point to the same conclusion. By the time Crawford was paroled in December 1864 and admitted to Camp Parole near Annapolis, he was suffering from chronic bronchitis and general debility. These conditions would follow him long after the war ended.

In the video below, I've paired the Notebook LM audio overview with a visual timeline of Crawford's service. Together they illustrate the arc of his Civil War experience — from cavalry soldier to prisoner of war, and from survival to the lasting physical cost of captivity.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=BRW4TZF8GPU

Understanding Homestead Laws: What They Required of Kansas Settlers

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 25, 2026
Crawford,homestead
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/25/homestead-law/

When researching ancestors who settled in the American West, it is common to encounter references to **homesteads** and **land patents**. These terms often appear in county histories, federal land records, and homestead files. But what did it actually mean to "homestead" land in Kansas?

Understanding the laws behind homesteading can help genealogists better interpret the records left behind by our ancestors.

For Kansas settlers in the late nineteenth century, two overlapping concepts existed: **federal homesteading under the Homestead Act of 1862** and **state homestead protections under the Kansas Constitution**. Although the two are sometimes confused, they served very different purposes.

The Federal Homestead Act

Most references to "homesteading" in Kansas relate to the **Homestead Act of 1862**, a federal law designed to encourage settlement of public lands in the West.

Under this law, a person could claim **160 acres of public land** by agreeing to live on and improve it. The goal was not simply to distribute land but to encourage the development of farms and permanent communities across the frontier. Homestead laws

Who Could Apply

To qualify for a homestead claim, an applicant generally had to:

- Be **at least 21 years old**, or the **head of a family**
- Be a **U.S. citizen** or have filed a declaration of intent to become one
- Swear loyalty to the United States
- Not have taken up arms against the United States after the Civil War

These requirements were intended to ensure that homesteads were claimed by individuals who intended to establish permanent homes rather than speculate on land. Homestead laws

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Filing a Homestead Claim

The process began at a **local land office**.

The applicant selected a tract of land—usually **160 acres**—and filed an application. A small filing fee was paid, and the land office issued a **receiver's receipt** acknowledging the claim. Homestead laws

From that point forward, the claimant had the right to occupy the land while working toward full ownership.

Living on the Land

Homesteading was not simply a matter of filing paperwork. The law required the claimant to **live on the land and develop it**.

Typically, the settler had to:

- Establish residence on the tract
- Live there **continuously for at least five years**
- Maintain the land as their primary home

Short absences were allowed, but long absences could be interpreted as abandonment of the claim. Homestead laws

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Improving the Land

Another key requirement was improving and cultivating the land.

The law did not list a precise checklist of improvements, but land offices expected to see evidence that the settler had created a working farm and residence. These improvements commonly included:

- Building a **dwelling house**
- Breaking and cultivating part of the land each season
- Planting crops
- Building **fences**
- Digging a **well**
- Constructing **outbuildings** such as barns or stables

These improvements demonstrated that the claimant intended to establish a permanent home rather than simply hold the land for speculation. Homestead laws

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"Proving Up"

After living on the land and improving it for **at least five years**, the homesteader returned to the land office to complete the final step known as **"proving up."**

This process required sworn testimony from the claimant and usually **two witnesses**.

Their affidavits had to confirm that:

- The claimant had lived on the land
- A dwelling had been built and occupied
- Crops had been planted and cultivated
- Improvements such as fences, wells, and buildings had been made

If the evidence was accepted, the government issued a **final certificate**, followed by a **land patent** granting legal title to the property. Homestead laws

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An Alternative Option: Commutation

Not every homesteader waited the full five years.

Under certain circumstances, settlers could **"commute"** their homestead claim to a cash purchase after about **six to fourteen months**. This allowed them to buy the land outright from the government rather than receive it as a free grant. Homestead laws

Even in these cases, the settler still had to demonstrate residence and improvements.

Homestead Records and Genealogy

For genealogists, homestead records can be remarkably rich sources of information.

The files often contain:

- applications and affidavits
- witness testimony
- descriptions of houses and improvements
- acreage cultivated
- names of neighbors
- military service statements
- family details

These documents frequently provide insights into an ancestor’s life that cannot be found in census records or vital records.

The Kansas Constitutional Homestead

Kansas law also included a **homestead provision in its state constitution**, but this served a different purpose.

Rather than granting land, the Kansas homestead law **protected a family’s residence from most forced sales by creditors**. In rural areas, this protection typically applied to **up to 160 acres of farmland occupied as the family home**. Homestead laws

Once a family established their home on the property, it could not generally be sold or mortgaged without the consent of both husband and wife.

Homesteading and the Settlement of Kansas

The Homestead Act played a major role in shaping Kansas history. Thousands of settlers claimed land across the state, transforming open prairie into farms and communities.

Although the process required years of work and perseverance, many families succeeded in building new lives on the land they claimed.

Today, the records they left behind provide valuable clues for genealogists seeking to understand the experiences of ancestors who helped settle the Kansas prairie.

Digging Into a Homestead File: Washington Marion Crawford's Kansas Land Claim

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 26, 2026
Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/26/homestead-claim/

One of the most interesting types of records available for genealogists researching ancestors in the American West is the **federal homestead file**. These files can contain dozens of pages documenting the process by which settlers claimed land under the **Homestead Act of 1862** and later amendments.

Recently I worked through the homestead file for my ancestor **Washington Marion Crawford**, who settled in **Ford County, Kansas** in the 1880s. The file contains **over thirty pages of documents**, including affidavits, witness testimony, military service statements, and land office correspondence.

Taken together, these records tell the detailed story of how Crawford established his claim on the Kansas prairie.

The Homestead Claim

Washington Marion Crawford applied for a homestead through the **United States Land Office at Garden City, Kansas**. His claim was for:

SE¼ Section 31
Township 28 South
Range 26 West
6th Principal Meridian
Ford County, Kansas
160 acres

This legal land description represents a **quarter section**, the standard amount granted under the Homestead Act.

The earliest document in the file shows Crawford filing a **declaratory statement on 31 March 1885**, paying a small fee to begin the process.

A Soldiers' Homestead

One of the most interesting documents in the file is Crawford's **Soldiers' Homestead affidavit**. Because he had served during the Civil War, Crawford could take advantage of federal legislation granting homestead benefits to Union veterans.

In his affidavit he stated that he had served in:

Company H
2nd New York Cavalry

He reported that he was:

- mustered into service **3 August 1861**
- honorably discharged **April 1865**

This information not only confirms his military service but also connects his Kansas homestead to his earlier life as a Union soldier.

Establishing the Claim

After filing his application, Crawford began the real work required of homesteaders: **living on the land and improving it**.

Testimony in the homestead file states that he first **settled on the land in March 1886**. The claim required him to live on the property, cultivate crops, and build improvements before he could receive full ownership.

The documents describe several improvements he made:

- a small **frame house with a sod addition**
- a **stable**
- fencing
- a **well**
- planted trees

Altogether, these improvements were valued at about **$200**, a significant investment for a frontier farmer.

Farming the Prairie

The land Crawford claimed was described in the testimony as **"prairie land — most valuable for farming."** The file notes that the land contained **no timber**, which was typical of the High Plains region of western Kansas.

Crawford gradually broke the tough prairie sod and began planting crops. By the time he submitted his final proof he had:

- broken **25 acres**
- planted **15 acres in crops**

The crops he raised included:

- **corn**
- **millet**
- **sorghum**

These crops were well suited to the semi-arid climate of southwestern Kansas.

Witness Testimony

A homestead claimant could not prove his case alone. The law required the testimony of **neighbors who could confirm that the claimant truly lived on the land and worked it**.

Crawford's witnesses included:

- **H. W. Purdom**
- **Joshua Osborn**
- **T. C. Guthrie**
- **Albert Guthrie**

Their sworn statements confirmed that Crawford had lived on the property, farmed the land, and built improvements there.

These names also provide useful clues about **neighbors and associates**, an important part of genealogical research.

Family Information

The homestead papers also reveal details about Crawford's family. At the time of his final proof he reported that he was living on the land with **his wife and seven children**.

This information provides valuable context for reconstructing the family's life during the late nineteenth century.

A Difficult Year

One affidavit in the file provides a glimpse into a difficult period for the family. Crawford explained that there had been a delay in establishing residence because **one of his daughters became seriously ill in 1886 and later died**.

A local physician, **Dr. S. O. Rose**, confirmed this statement in a supporting affidavit.

Documents like this remind us that homestead records sometimes preserve deeply personal details about family hardships.

Final Proof

After several years of residence and cultivation, Crawford appeared before the **clerk of the district court in Dodge City** on **16 July 1889** to make his **final proof**.

During this hearing:

- Crawford testified about his residence and improvements.
- Witnesses confirmed his statements.
- The documents were certified and sent to the **General Land Office** in Washington.

The Land Patent

The process concluded the following year.

On **27 May 1890**, the United States issued a **land patent** granting Crawford full ownership of the property. The patent was signed by **President Benjamin Harrison**.

With that document, the 160 acres Crawford had worked for several years officially became his land.

Why Homestead Files Matter

Homestead files are rich genealogical sources. In Crawford's case the documents revealed:

- his **Civil War military service**
- his **birthplace in Indiana**
- the **location of his Kansas farm**
- the **names of neighbors and witnesses**
- information about his **wife and children**
- details about the family's life on the prairie

These records transform a simple land description into a much fuller picture of an ancestor's life.

In my next post, I'll take a closer look at what life might have been like for **Washington Marion Crawford and his family as homesteaders on the Kansas prairie near Dodge City in the 1880s**.

If you'd like, I can also help you:

• write the **follow-up narrative post** about life on the prairie
• create a **map of the homestead location** for the blog
• write the **meta description and social media blurb** for this post.

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These names also provide useful clues about **neighbors and associates**, an important part of genealogical research.

Family Information

The homestead papers also reveal details about Crawford's family. At the time of his final proof he reported that he was living on the land with **his wife and seven children**.

This information provides valuable context for reconstructing the family's life during the late nineteenth century.

A Difficult Year

One affidavit in the file provides a glimpse into a difficult period for the family. Crawford explained that there had been a delay in establishing residence because **one of his daughters became seriously ill in 1886 and later died**.

A local physician, **Dr. S. O. Rose**, confirmed this statement in a supporting affidavit.

Documents like this remind us that homestead records sometimes preserve deeply personal details about family hardships.

Final Proof

After several years of residence and cultivation, Crawford appeared before the **clerk of the district court in Dodge City** on **16 July 1889** to make his **final proof**.

During this hearing:

- Crawford testified about his residence and improvements.
- Witnesses confirmed his statements.
- The documents were certified and sent to the **General Land Office** in Washington.

The Land Patent

The process concluded the following year.

On **27 May 1890**, the United States issued a **land patent** granting Crawford full ownership of the property. The patent was signed by **President Benjamin Harrison**.

With that document, the 160 acres Crawford had worked for several years officially became his land.

Why Homestead Files Matter

Homestead files are rich genealogical sources. In Crawford's case the documents revealed:

- his **Civil War military service**
- his **birthplace in Indiana**
- the **location of his Kansas farm**
- the **names of neighbors and witnesses**
- information about his **wife and children**
- details about the family's life on the prairie

These records transform a simple land description into a much fuller picture of an ancestor's life.

In my next post, I'll take a closer look at what life might have been like for **Washington Marion Crawford and his family as homesteaders on the Kansas prairie near Dodge City in the 1880s**.

A Homestead on the Kansas Prairie: Washington Marion Crawford in Ford County, Kansas

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 27, 2026
Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/27/homestead-2/

When **Washington Marion Crawford** settled on his homestead in **Ford County, Kansas**, in the mid-1880s, he arrived in a place that had only recently begun to transition from frontier to farming community. Just a decade earlier, the nearby town of **Dodge City** had been one of the most famous cattle towns of the American West.

By the time Crawford arrived, however, the era of cattle drives and frontier lawmen was fading. Dodge City was becoming the commercial center for a growing population of farmers and homesteaders who were transforming the prairie into farmland.

Washington Crawford was one of those settlers.

From Soldier to Homesteader

Before coming to Kansas, Crawford had served in the **Union Army during the Civil War**. He enlisted in **Company H of the 2nd New York Cavalry** on **3 August 1861** and remained in service for nearly four years before being honorably discharged in **April 1865**.

Like many veterans, Crawford later took advantage of legislation granting **homestead benefits to Civil War soldiers**. These laws allowed veterans to apply their military service toward the requirements of the Homestead Act.

In **1885**, Crawford filed a claim at the **United States Land Office in Garden City, Kansas** for a 160-acre tract of land in Ford County.

The land was described as:

SE¼ Section 31
Township 28 South
Range 26 West
Ford County, Kansas

This quarter-section of prairie would become Crawford's home.

The Kansas Prairie

The land Crawford claimed was typical of western Kansas during the late nineteenth century.

Witness testimony in his homestead file described the land as:

> “Prairie land — most valuable for farming.”

Unlike the wooded landscapes many settlers had known in the eastern United States, the High Plains were largely **treeless grasslands**. The region was characterized by:

- open rolling prairie
- short-grass vegetation
- limited rainfall
- hot summers and cold winters

Water often had to be obtained by digging **deep wells**, and timber for building was scarce.

Yet the prairie soil could produce crops when rainfall was sufficient, and the promise of owning land drew many settlers westward.

Settling the Claim

Crawford began settling his claim in **March 1886**. Under the Homestead Act, a settler had to live on the land, cultivate it, and make improvements before receiving full ownership.

Crawford and his family gradually established their home on the prairie. According to the homestead testimony, his improvements included:

- a small **frame house with a sod addition**
- a **stable**
- fencing
- a **well**
- planted trees

He also began breaking the tough prairie sod for farming.

By the time he made final proof on his claim, Crawford had:

- broken **25 acres of land**
- planted **15 acres in crops**

The crops he raised included:

- **corn**
- **millet**
- **sorghum**

These were hardy crops well suited to the semi-arid climate of western Kansas.

Life Near Dodge City

Although Crawford lived on the prairie, the nearby town of **Dodge City** played an important role in the lives of homesteaders in Ford County.

During the 1870s Dodge City had been a legendary cattle town where Texas longhorns were shipped by rail to eastern markets. Cowboys, gamblers, and lawmen such as **Wyatt Earp** and **Bat Masterson** made the town famous across the country.

By the 1880s, however, the cattle-drive era was fading. Railroads had expanded south into Texas, and long cattle drives to Kansas were no longer necessary.

Dodge City increasingly became a **service center for farmers**. Homesteaders traveled there to:

- purchase supplies
- ship crops by rail
- attend court proceedings
- visit doctors and schools
- conduct business

Crawford himself appeared in Dodge City when he gave testimony for his homestead claim before the **clerk of the district court**.

Challenges of Prairie Life

Life on the High Plains was not easy.

Homesteaders faced many challenges, including:

- drought
- harsh weather
- crop failures
- insect infestations such as chinch bugs
- economic hardship

Crawford's homestead file even records a family tragedy. One affidavit explains that his family delayed moving fully onto the claim because a **daughter became seriously ill in 1886 and later died**.

Such personal details remind us that the story of homesteading was not only about land and farming but also about the families who struggled to build lives on the frontier.

Timeline of Crawford's Homestead

The homestead records provide a clear timeline of Crawford's journey from applicant to landowner.

28 March 1885
Crawford prepared a Soldier's Declaratory Statement authorizing an agent to file his claim.

31 March 1885
Declaratory statement filed at the Garden City Land Office.

29 September 1885
Soldiers' Homestead affidavit submitted.

9 October 1885
Homestead entry officially recorded.

9 March 1886
Crawford first settled on the land.

1 March 1887
Crawford and his family established permanent residence on the homestead.

28 May 1889
Notice of intention to make final proof filed and published.

16 July 1889
Crawford gave final testimony before the clerk of the district court in Dodge City.

12 August 1889
Final certificate issued by the Garden City Land Office.

27 May 1890
The United States issued a **land patent**, signed by **President Benjamin Harrison**, granting Crawford ownership of the 160-acre tract.

A Prairie Legacy

Washington Marion Crawford's homestead represents a small part of the larger story of settlement in western Kansas during the late nineteenth century.

Within just a few decades, land that had once been open prairie supporting buffalo herds and cattle drives had been divided into farms worked by families like the Crawfords.

Through perseverance, hard work, and several years of residence and cultivation, Crawford transformed a tract of prairie into a family farm and secured ownership of his land.

His homestead file preserves the details of that effort—documents that allow us, more than a century later, to glimpse the experience of one family building a life on the Kansas frontier.

Washington Marion Crawford's Homestead Story

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 28, 2026
Crawford,homestead
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/28/homestead-3/

In my previous posts, I explored the homestead documents for my ancestor **Washington Marion Crawford** and the laws that governed how settlers claimed land on the Kansas prairie. Those records reveal the steps Crawford followed to obtain 160 acres in **Ford County, Kansas**, during the 1880s.

While reading through the documents, it became clear that Crawford's path to land ownership was not a simple one. Like many homesteaders, he had to navigate federal regulations, establish residence on the land, cultivate crops, build improvements, and provide witness testimony to prove that he had fulfilled the requirements of the Homestead Act.

To help visualize that process, I turned to **Google Notebook LM**. Using the information gathered from Crawford's homestead file, the tool created both an **infographic summarizing the homesteading process** and an **audio overview explaining the timeline of Crawford's claim and the challenges he encountered along the way**.

I combined that audio overview with the infographic to create the video below. The result is a short presentation that walks through Washington Marion Crawford's journey from Civil War veteran to Kansas homesteader and explains the legal steps he had to complete before receiving his land patent.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=J4tYHaqteSc

This overview provides another way to experience the story contained in Crawford's homestead records and to better understand what it took to turn a claim on the prairie into a permanent family farm.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 29, 2026
Currey,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/29/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-194/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again –

time for some more Genealogy Fun!!

Here is your assignment if you choose to play along (cue the Mission Impossible music, please!):

1) Write a story using the phrase "ancestor I really admire" in 200 words.

My grandmother, Winnie Currey Crawford, is an ancestor I really admire. She unknowingly set me on my genealogy path when she wondered aloud where her own grandmother was buried. That simple question revealed how deeply she valued family connections.

Winnie's childhood was marked by loss. When her mother died in 1913, ten-year-old Winnie saw her family scattered—her baby brother placed with one family, her younger sister with another, and Winnie and her older sisters sent to a children's home before eventually returning to their father. Stability came slowly.

By fifteen, she claimed to be older so she could work in a factory in north Kansas City alongside her sister Mary. They lived with cousins, piecing together a sense of family wherever they could. A year later, Winnie moved to Dodge City to help her sister Myrtle with a newborn, and by Christmas, she was married.

Despite hardship and separation, Winnie never let those early fractures define her. She stayed connected to siblings and cousins throughout her life. Her quiet determination to hold family together is the legacy I admire most—and the reason I continue the search she began.

Monday's Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 30, 2026
Briles,North Carolina,Randolph County, NC
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/30/mondays-diggings-28/

The McCubbins Collection and the Bryal Surprise

Have you ever pulled an old photocopy from your files and realized it still has something to teach you?

During one of my parents' research trips to Randolph County, North Carolina, they obtained a photocopy from a private research collection known as the **McCubbins Collection** [BRILES Folder], housed in the Edith Clark History Room at the Rowan Public Library in Salisbury, North Carolina. Today, that collection has been digitized and is available through the library's website and on FamilySearch — but at the time, this photocopy was a valuable on-site find.

Recently rediscovering it reminded me of two important lessons:

1. Always study county boundary changes.
2. Always watch for surname spelling variations.

Why Rowan County Matters

My Briles family owned land in Randolph County, North Carolina. However, Randolph County was not always Randolph County.

- Randolph County was formed in 1779 from **Guilford County**.
- Guilford County was formed in 1771 from **Rowan County**.

That means earlier records for families who later lived in Randolph County may actually be found in Rowan County records.

If you research North Carolina families, I highly recommend reviewing historical county boundary maps. A helpful visual tool can be found at mapofus.org/northcarolina, which shows how county lines shifted over time. [Map of Us for North Carolina]

Because of these boundary changes, Rowan County contains records relevant to my Briles ancestors — even though I usually think of them as a Randolph County family.

And this particular document proved it.

Clean Genealogical Abstract

McCubbins Collection, Rowan County, North Carolina

1. Henry McCulloh to Cotney Briel

- Date: 11 February 1763 (3rd year of King George III)
- Source: Rowan County Deed Book 5, p. 337
- Transaction: 200 acres in Tract #10
- Location: Near John Sheppard; crossing a fork of Shepherd's Creek and the main fork of said creek
- Consideration: 19 pounds
- Witnesses: Robert Rainey and Alexander Ford
- Proved: October 1763

---

2. State Grant to Frederic Bryal

- Date: 20 December 1791
- Source: Rowan County Deed Book 16, p. 656
- Grant No.: 2139 (50 shillings per 100 acres)
- Acreage: 200 acres
- Location: East side of Hamby Creek, adjoining Jacob Lop; crossing Hamby Creek; near Gasper Sprinkle
- Note: Identified as made out of a land grant

Important spelling variation noted: "Bryal."

---

3. Frederic Briles to George Briles

- Date: 19 December 1814
- Source: Rowan County Deed Book 20, p. 476
- Grantor: Frederic Briles of Randolph County, North Carolina
- Grantee: George Briles of Rowan County, North Carolina
- Property:
  - 200 acres on both sides of Hamby Creek near Gasper Springer
  - Additional 52 acres on Hamby Creek adjoining Jacob Lop and Gasper Sprinkle
- Consideration: $500.00
- Witnesses: Ansel Pearce and John Briles
- Proved: August 1815 by John Briles
- Notation: No wife signed

The Bryal Clue

One of the most valuable reminders from this photocopy was the spelling **Bryal**.

Over time, I had focused almost exclusively on the Briles spelling. Seeing Bryal again reinforces the importance of searching creatively — especially in indexed databases. Spelling variations are not just clerical errors; they are research pathways.

Bryal.
Briel.
Brile.
Briles.
Perhaps others.

Every variation deserves attention.

Research Is Layered

This single photocopy connects:

- Rowan County records
- Randolph County residence
- Hamby Creek land
- Multiple generations of Briles men
- A spelling variation I had nearly forgotten

It also reflects the gift of parents willing to stop at libraries, visit local historians, and bring home copies that still inform my research decades later.

Sometimes Monday’s Diggings isn’t about finding something new.

Sometimes it’s about realizing what you already had.

Mary Foster Crawford

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
March 31, 2026
ABC Biography,Crawford,Dodge City,Foster
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/03/31/mary-foster-crawford-3/

Are you a storyteller? Can you take the fact-filled reports from your genealogy software and turn them into readable stories that your family will actually enjoy? I have to admit that turning a narrative report full of dates, places, and citations into a true life story would be a real challenge for me.

That is one reason I'm thankful for the leaders in the Genealogy and AI communities who have been sharing ways to use artificial intelligence as a writing assistant. Over the past year, I have learned that AI tools can help transform my research reports into biographies that are much easier to read while still staying true to the documented facts.

Today's story is about my 2nd great-grandmother, **Mary Foster Crawford**. The biography below was created by ChatGPT using the prompt shown below and a narrative report generated by my genealogy software, RootsMagic.

> You are an expert genealogist. Attached is a PDF file containing information about one of my relatives. Italicized text is from newspaper articles and other primary sources. Please create a draft biography from the attached file, including parents, siblings, spouses and children (with birth and death dates and places), summarize life events, and add historical facts as appropriate, but do not add or embellish any extra genealogical details. Please use any newspaper articles and/or excerpts to enhance the biography. Use section headings. Expand the information in each section to add more details. Incorporate the footnotes from the original document. At the end, add a section providing historical context for this person's life. The tone should be casual and suitable for family members.

Biography of Mary Foster Crawford (1842–1929)

Birth and Family Background

Mary Foster was born on 28 August 1842 in West Lebanon, Warren County, Indiana.[1–6]
She was the daughter of **Zebulon Foster** and his wife (name not stated in the record). Mary appeared in the household of Zebulon Foster in the 1850 census in Pike Township, Warren County, Indiana, confirming that she grew up in that community.[7]

By 1860, she was still living in Warren County, Indiana, and was listed as a 17-year-old in the household of her father.[8]

Records connected to later land transactions show that Mary had several siblings, including:

- Edward Foster
- Rachel (Foster) Crider

- Hattie (Foster) Fleming
- Eliza (Foster) Bell
- William Foster

These siblings were involved with Mary in the sale and purchase of family land in Warren County, Indiana in the late 1880s, after the death of their parents.[45-46]

Mary grew up during a time when Warren County was still a fairly rural agricultural area, and families often remained close to the land for generations.

Marriage to Washington Marion Crawford

Mary married **Washington Marion Crawford** on 4 March 1860 in West Lebanon, Indiana.[2 5 9–17]

The marriage record reads in part:

> *Know ye that any person empowered by law to solemnize marriages is hereby authorized to join together as husband and wife Washington M. Crawford and Mary Foster…*[9]

The ceremony was performed by Colbrath Hull, a minister of the Gospel.[9]

Shortly after their marriage, the couple was living in Warren County, Indiana, where they began raising a family.[8]

Civil War Years

Only a year after their marriage, the Civil War changed their lives.

On 3 August 1861, Washington enlisted as a Sergeant in Company H of the 2nd New York Cavalry, known as the **Harris Light Horse**.[18]

During the war he was captured on 22 September 1863 at Liberty Mills, Orange County, Virginia. He was held prisoner at **Belle Isle** and later at **Andersonville**, two of the most notorious Confederate prison camps, before being released in December 1864.[18–19]

While her husband was away at war, Mary remained in Indiana and cared for their young children.

Children of Washington and Mary (Foster) Crawford

The following children are documented in the report:

1. **Ida Kate Crawford**, born 18 December 1862, Warren County, Indiana.[2]
2. **Judson Foster Crawford**, born 15 April 1866, Warren County, Indiana.[2]
3. **Carrie A. Crawford**, born 10 February 1870, Warren County, Indiana.
4. **Lida A. Crawford**, born 22 December 1871, Warren County, Indiana.[2]
5. **Nelson Garfield Crawford**, born 29 October 1881, Warren County, Indiana.[2]

Carrie died young in Dodge City, Kansas, on 20 July 1886, an event Mary personally witnessed.[23–28]

Later records show the surviving children as:

- Ida (Mrs. Sherman)
- Judson F. Crawford
- Lida (Mrs. Lighter)
- Nelson G. Crawford

These names appear in Mary's obituary.[2]

Move to Kansas and Life in Dodge City

The Crawford family moved west to **Dodge City, Ford County, Kansas**, in 1884.[2]

Mary appeared in the 1885 Kansas census living there with her husband and children.[21–22]

Dodge City at that time was still a developing frontier town, known for cattle drives, railroads, and rapid growth. Many families moved there hoping for new opportunities.

Death of Her Husband

Washington Marion Crawford died suddenly on 23 August 1889 at Fort Dodge, Kansas.[2] [32]–[43]

After his death, Mary applied for and received a **Civil War widow's pension** on 23 November 1889.[47]

As a widow with children to support, Mary became head of the household and managed her own affairs, which was not uncommon for frontier women.

Property, Business, and Independence

After her husband's death, Mary handled both Kansas and Indiana property transactions with her siblings.[45]–[49]

In Dodge City she supported herself by operating a boarding house.

The 1895 Kansas census lists her as:

> *a 52-year-old white female boardinghouse owner born in Indiana…*[50]

She continued to rent rooms for many years, with newspaper notices stating:

> *Mary Crawford had rooms for rent at the corner of 2d Avenue and Elm Street.*[55]

and

> *Two furnished rooms for rent…*[56]

Operating a boarding house was a common way for widowed women to earn income in growing western towns.

Church, Community, and Civic Life

Mary was active in the Methodist Church in Dodge City.

In 1901 she served as **president of the Home Missionary Society**, showing that she was respected in the community.[54]

She also registered to vote in 1897, after Kansas allowed women to vote in municipal elections, reflecting her involvement in civic life.[51]

Later Years

Mary lived for many years at **911 Second Avenue in Dodge City**, where she appeared in the 1910, 1915, 1920, and 1925 censuses.[61] [67] [69] [75]

She lived long enough to see her children established and her son **Nelson Garfield Crawford** become postmaster of Dodge City.[2]

In September 1920, she even returned to West Lebanon, Indiana for a visit, showing she maintained ties to her birthplace.[72]

Death

Mary Foster Crawford died suddenly on 21 January 1929 in Dodge City, Kansas, at age 86.[2–5 76–81]

Her obituary stated:

> *Mrs. Mary Crawford, pioneer Dodge City resident… died suddenly yesterday at her home. She had lived in Dodge City more than 44 years, moving here in 1884.*[2]

It also noted:

> *She had been a member of the Methodist church for many years and a charter member of the Home Missionary Society.*[2]

She was buried on 23 January 1929 at **Maple Grove Cemetery, Dodge City, Kansas**.[3 82]

Historical Context

Mary Foster Crawford lived through one of the most dramatic periods in American history.

She was born before the Civil War, married just as the war began, and endured the hardship of having a husband captured and imprisoned. She raised her children during the difficult post-war years and later moved west during the era of frontier settlement.

When she arrived in Dodge City in 1884, the town was only a few years removed from its reputation as a cattle-drive boomtown. By the time she died in 1929, Dodge City had become a stable community with churches, schools, and businesses.

Mary's life reflects the experience of many 19th-century American women:

- Daughter of a farming family in Indiana
- Wife of a Civil War soldier
- Mother raising children during wartime
- Pioneer moving west
- Widow supporting herself through business
- Church and community leader
- Long-time resident who witnessed the transformation of the American frontier

Her story shows resilience, independence, and the ability to adapt to changing times — qualities shared by many women of her generation.

Writing these ABC Biography posts has shown me how much information can be hidden inside a simple narrative report. When the facts are expanded into a story, the person becomes much more real.

Using AI as a writing assistant does not replace the research — the facts still come from the records — but it does make it easier to turn those facts into something that family members can read and understand.

I'm thankful for the encouragement from the Genealogy and AI community to try this process, and I plan to continue creating these biographies from my RootsMagic reports as time allows.

Mary Foster Crawford's life spanned the Civil War, the move west to Kansas, and the growth of Dodge City from a frontier town into a permanent community. Turning her timeline into a story helped me see her life in a way I hadn't before.

Why AI Needs More Context: Lessons from a Mary Crawford Biography

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 1, 2026
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford,Dodge City
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/01/ai-2/

Most of us are aware that artificial intelligence can hallucinate. While working with Google Notebook LM, I ran into a different kind of problem — incorrect information that was not caused by hallucination, but by the AI making assumptions about the historical setting.

I had provided Google Notebook LM with a narrative report for my great-great-grandmother, **Mary Foster Crawford**, and asked it to generate a brief video about her life. I really liked the video it created, but it included several historical inaccuracies. The video showed:

- the family migrating by wagon from Indiana to Kansas when the railroad was already established
- Dodge City portrayed as a wild-west cowtown when it was actually becoming a settled frontier community for families
- an image of a “Crawford Grocers” storefront even though there was no mention of a grocery in her records

While I immediately recognized these problems, I realized that someone watching the video might not notice the errors. That meant I needed to figure out how to give the AI tool better historical context so it would not make those assumptions.

Since I want to continue using **RootsMagic narrative reports** as the source for these AI-generated biographies and videos, I decided to add a few historical facts directly into the narrative report. I added these as miscellaneous facts shared between Mary and her husband, using the description field to hold the explanatory sentence.

Below are two of the historical context statements I added:

> The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad reached Dodge City in September 1872.
>
> Between 1878 and 1884, Dodge City changed from a rough cattle-drive railhead into a more settled town as railroads moved west, farming spread, and the Old West era came to an end. During this time, schools and churches were built as families moved into the community.

To add even more context to Mary’s life, I also added a couple of events to her timeline as a witness to events in her husband’s narrative:

> In 1884, James H. Crawford expected his brother, Washington Marion Crawford, along with Washington’s wife Mary and their children, to arrive in Dodge City from Indiana by train.

In September 1884, Mary Foster assisted her husband, Washington Marion Crawford, as landlord of the Iowa House boarding house on Front Street in Dodge City.

After updating the narrative report with these additional details, I generated a new video in Google Notebook LM. This time, the added historical context kept the AI from making incorrect assumptions about travel, the railroad, and life in Dodge City.

Below is the updated brief video.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=P2iG2cyOvFg

From this experience, I learned that when using AI tools to generate stories or videos, it may be necessary to add historical context directly into our genealogy reports. The facts in our database may be correct, but without enough background information, AI may fill in the gaps with assumptions that don't match the actual history.

One Deed – Three Generations

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 2, 2026
Botetourt County,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/02/one-deed-three-generations/

Have you ever tried to piece together a family when multiple families of the same surname are living in the same place at the same time? If so, you understand the challenge. That scenario seems to be a regular occurrence in my **CRAWFORD** research.

Recently, while helping another researcher, I revisited the family of John Crawford the elder and his wife Jean Byers of Botetourt County. In the process, I uncovered a particularly valuable deed created by his grandson, James Crawford, in 1797.

At first glance, the deed appears to be a routine land transaction. But a closer reading reveals something far more useful: it clearly outlines relationships across three generations of the Crawford family.

This deed documents the partition of a 190-acre tract originally purchased by John Crawford the elder from John Craig and later devised in his will to his sons, William Crawford and John Crawford (deceased before 1797). After John (the younger) died, his son James—acting as executor—carried out the division of the land and formally confirmed William's share.

Because this can quickly become confusing (three men named John Crawford will do that!), I asked ChatGPT to extract the family structure from the deed. The results provide a clear snapshot of the relationships described:

Family Information from the 1797 Deed

First Generation

- John Crawford the elder
  - Purchased a 190-acre tract on Craig's Creek
  - Deceased before 1796
  - Left a will dividing the land

  Children:
  - William Crawford
  - John Crawford (deceased before 1797)

Second Generation

- William Crawford
  - Living in 1797

    - Receives 95 acres (half the tract)
- John Crawford (deceased before 1797)
    - Deceased before the deed
    - Will proved December Court 1796

Child:

    - James Crawford

Third Generation

- James Crawford
    - Son of John (deceased)
    - Grandson of John Crawford the elder
    - Executor of his father's estate
    - Divided the 190-acre tract
    - Relinquished all claim to William's 95 acres

Not only does this deed connect three generations of the Crawford family, it also points the way to additional records. Based on the information it contains, I should be able to locate:

- The will of John Crawford the elder
- The will of John Crawford (proved December 1796)
- Earlier deeds documenting the original purchase from John Craig
- Additional records related to the division of the remaining acreage

This is a great example of how a single document—carefully read—can untangle relationships that might otherwise remain buried in a tangle of same-named individuals.

The image and full transcription of the deed are attached to the following profiles in the FamilySearch Family Tree:

- John Crawford the elder [GH1S-F8M]
- William Crawford [GH1S-P1Z]
- James Crawford [G8Z1-SZD]

Friday Find

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 3, 2026
Uncategorized
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/03/friday-find-112/

Do you have items tucked away in your files that lack solid source citations? I certainly do—and this document from my Crawford Kentucky file is one of them.

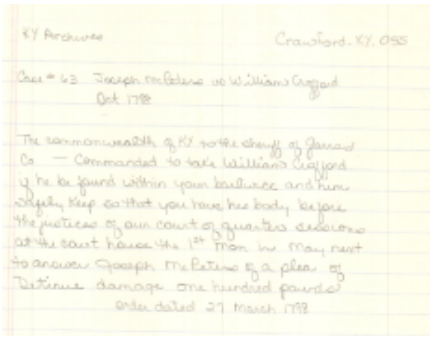
Based on my notation “KY Archives,” I believe I obtained this record at the Kentucky Archives. However, beyond that brief note, the details are frustratingly sparse. While the document clearly relates to a court case, I have not yet been able to locate the original record using FamilySearch’s full-text search. For now, it remains a source without a fully identified citation.

The mystery doesn’t end there. I also cannot say with certainty who the individuals in the document are. The surname “Crofford” is almost certainly “Crawford,” and “McPeters” may well be a variation of “McPheeters.” If those assumptions are correct, both men could trace their roots back to families in Augusta County, Virginia—a connection worth further investigation.

For now, this record sits in that all-too-familiar category: intriguing, suggestive, and just out of reach.

While many questions remain, the document itself offers a few clues. Here is the transcription:

> KY Archives Crawford KY 055
>
> Case # 63 Joseph McPeters vs William Crawford
> Oct 1798
>
> The commonwealth of KY to the sheriff of Garrard Co — Commanded to take William Crawford if he be found within your bailiwick and him safely keep so that you have his body before the justices of our court of quarter sessions at the court house the 1st Mon in May next to answer Joseph McPeters of a plea of Detinue damage one hundred pounds
>
> order dated 27 March 1798


KY Archives Crawford. KY. 055

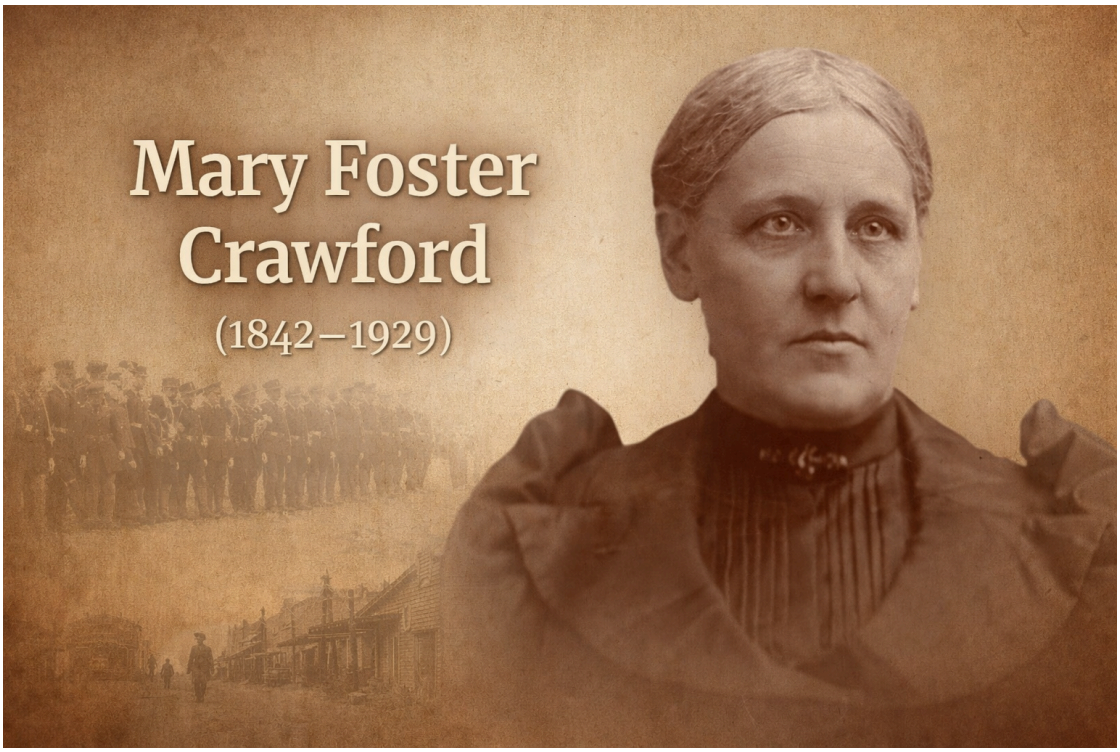
Case # 63 Joseph McPeters vs William Crafford
Oct 1798

The commonwealth of KY to the sheriff of Garrard Co — Commanded to take William Crafford if he be found within your bailiwick and him safely keep so that you have his body before the justices of our court of quarter sessions at the court house the 1st Mon in May next to answer Joseph McPeters of a plea of Trespass damage one hundred pounds
order dated 27 March 1798

Even without a complete citation, this record adds another piece to the Crawford puzzle. A William Crawford involved in a Garrard County court case in 1798 may connect to the broader network of Crawford, McPheeters, and associated families I've been tracing. This is exactly the kind of clue that fuels FAN club research—one small record that may eventually link multiple families together.

More Ways to Tell the Story: Two Videos About Mary Foster Crawford

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 4, 2026
ABC Biography,Artificial Intelligence,Crawford,Dodge City,Foster
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/04/story/



In several recent posts, I've shared how I have been using AI tools along with my genealogy software to turn narrative reports into stories, audio overviews, songs, and videos. This has become a regular part of how I work with my research, especially when I want to create something that family members can enjoy without having to read through pages of notes and citations.

My 2nd great-grandmother, **Mary Foster Crawford (1842–1929)**, has been the focus of several of these projects. After creating a narrative report in RootsMagic and expanding it into a readable biography, I used that same report again to create two more videos — each using a different combination of AI tools.

Both videos are based on the same documented facts, but they tell her story in very different ways.

Video 1 — NotebookLM Audio Overview and Infographic

As I have done in several recent projects, I uploaded Mary's narrative report to **Google NotebookLM** and asked it to generate an audio overview of her life. NotebookLM also created an infographic summarizing the major events in her timeline.

I then used **Canva** to combine the audio overview and the infographic to create a short video telling her story.

This version follows the narrative report fairly closely and presents the information in a straightforward historical style.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=Bqb2yLLZAeI

Surviving the War Years
Raising a Pioneer Family:
Establishing a Legacy
Migration to Dodge City (1884)
Migration to Dodge City (1884)
Boarding House Entrepreneur
Civic and Religious Engagement

Video 2 — Song Version Using Suno

For the second video, I followed another process that I have been using more often — turning a biography into a song.

Using ChatGPT, I wrote lyrics about Mary Foster Crawford in a Civil War–era ballad style. Those lyrics were then used in **Suno.com** to create the music.

I asked ChatGPT to create a feature image created using one of Mary's photographs and historicalstyling. Using **Canva**, I combined the song, and the imageto create another video.

This version tells the same story, but in a more emotional and storytelling format rather than a narrated summary.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=gAN4-FvWCcQ

One Narrative Report — Many Ways to Tell the Story

One thing I continue to notice as I use this process is that the same narrative report can be used over and over again in different ways.

From the same RootsMagic report, I have now created:

- a written biography
- an audio overview
- an infographic
- a narrated video
- a song
- a music video

The facts have not changed — only the way the story is told.

Some people prefer reading a biography.
Some like listening to a summary.
Some enjoy a song more than a timeline.
And some will watch a short video when they would never read a report.

Using these tools lets me share the same research in whatever format works best.

Why I Keep Using This Process

This has become a regular part of my genealogy workflow.

I still start with the research.
I still build the narrative report in RootsMagic.
But once the facts are in place, AI tools make it much easier to turn those facts into something that feels like a story.

Mary Foster Crawford lived through the Civil War, the move west to Kansas, and the early years of Dodge City. Being able to tell her story in several different formats helps bring her life off the page and makes it easier to share with the rest of the family.

And that is really the goal of all of this — not just to collect information, but to tell the stories of the people who came before us.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 5, 2026
Crawford,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/05/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-195/

Turning Points

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again –

time for some more Genealogy Fun!!

Here is your assignment if you choose to play along (cue the *Mission Impossible* music, please!):

1. Family stories are often about "Turning Points" and "Major Decisions."
2. This week, please describe a turning point in the life of one of your parents (or grandparents). Describe the decision and discuss the outcome.

Every time a head of household changes jobs, it becomes a turning point for the entire family. While my dad taught science in three different high schools before moving us to his hometown of Dodge City, it was his decision to go back to school that became the most significant turning point in our lives.

My dad loved teaching science, but his position at Dodge City Community College was gradually shifting from teaching into administration. That transition likely prompted him to consider other opportunities—including pursuing a doctorate. That possibility became reality when he was accepted into a doctoral program at the University of Nebraska.

That single acceptance set a series of major changes into motion.

Our house was sold in June, and we moved in with my grandparents until it was time to relocate to Nebraska in August. My mother, Roberta, went to work full-time to help support the family while my dad focused on his studies.

For my brothers and me, it meant leaving behind schools where we had known our classmates since kindergarten and starting over in a place where we knew no one.

While at the University of Nebraska, my dad, Eugene Crawford, was awarded the Herbert Brownell Fellowship in Science Education—an honor that affirmed he had made the right decision.

- Social and Local -

Evelyn LaVone Krug Phone 3-4151

Wedding information data blanks are available by calling or writing to the Society Editor of The Dodge City Daily Globe. Wedding information should be received by this office three days before the wedding. If possible, please include a black and white glossy picture, four inches wide. Wedding pictures received by this office seven days after the ceremony will be used with a cutline only.

RECEIVES FELLOWSHIP — Eugene Crawford, former registrar at Dodge City Community Junior College, has been granted the Herbert Brownell Fellowship Science Education by the Board of Regents at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebr. The fellowship is granted to a student who is a candidate for a graduate degree with special emphasis on science education and whose record gives promise of unusual accomplishments. Mr. Crawford, son of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Crawford, 911 Second Ave., is also on the staff of the University as part time instructor.

After two years in Lincoln, he completed his coursework and accepted a position at Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia, Kansas. In a full-circle moment, he returned to teach at his alma mater, and our family moved to my mother's hometown.

In August 1971, Eugene Crawford received his doctorate in science education from the University of Nebraska—a milestone that began with a single, life-changing decision.

Monday's Diggings – A Will That Connects the Wells Family

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 6, 2026
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/06/mondays-diggings-29/

One of the things I love most about digging into my files is how a single document can illuminate an entire family network. This week's find is a perfect example.

While working through my WELLS notebook, I came across the 1937 will of **Eltha L. Wells** of Charlotte. At first glance, it appears to be a fairly typical will—pay debts, leave a small bequest, and distribute the remainder of the estate. But as is often the case, the real value lies in the details.

The Will of Eltha L. Wells

Eltha's will names her daughter, **Winifred E. Wells**, as her primary heir and executrix. She also leaves a specific bequest of $500 to **Alonzo W. Hill** of Vermontville Township—an individual who may represent a close associate or extended family connection worth further research.

What makes this document especially valuable, however, is the contingency clause. If her daughter had predeceased her, Eltha carefully outlined how her estate should be divided—providing a roadmap to her husband's extended family.

Reconstructing the Wells Family

Eltha was the widow of **Clark Eugene Wells (1853–1937)**. Through this will, we gain a multi-generational snapshot of Clark's family:

- **Siblings of Clark Wells**
  - Alice Parker
  - Perry B. Wells
- **Descendants of George Wells (Clark's deceased brother)**
  - Dalton Wells
  - Gladys Wells Holden
- **Children of Clayton H. Wells (half-brother of Clark)**
  - Carl B. Wells
  - Hazel M. Rickley
  - Violetta Purdy
  - Leola Vincent

- **Descendant of Clinton K. Wells (half-brother of Clark)**
  - Nellie Barningham

Each of these names represents a branch of the Wells family tree, many of them identified with married surnames—making this will especially useful for tracing female lines.

A Personal Connection

What makes this document particularly meaningful to me is that Clark Eugene Wells is not just a name in the records—he is part of my own family.

Clark was the son of **Benjamin Franklin Wells** and **Anna Mariah Benham**, and the grandson of **Ozias Wells (1796–1832)** and **Mary Kennedy**. Ozias and Mary are also my ancestors, making Clark my **first cousin three times removed**.

That connection transforms this will from a simple probate record into something much more personal. The individuals named here are not just part of Clark's family—they are part of my extended family as well.

Why This Record Matters

This will highlights several reasons probate records are essential for genealogical research:

- It identifies **multiple generations** within a single document
- It preserves **married names of women**, often difficult to trace
- It clarifies **family relationships**, including half-siblings
- It provides a clear example of **FAN club research in action**

Even though Eltha's estate ultimately passed to her daughter, the contingency clause preserved a detailed map of the Wells family—one that might not exist anywhere else in such a concise form.

Final Thoughts

Sometimes the most valuable genealogical clues are hidden in the "what if" sections of a document. In this case, a contingency that never took effect still gives us a rich and detailed picture of an extended family.

That's the beauty of digging into records—you never know when a single document will connect the past to your own story.

Will of Eltha L. Wells

> I, Eltha L. Wells, of the City of Charlotte, Eaton County, Michigan, being of sound mind and memory, but knowing the uncertainty of this life, do hereby make, publish and declare this to be my last will and testament, in the manner following:
>
> **FIRST:** I direct that all my just debts and funeral expenses be paid in full.
>
> **SECOND:** I give, devise and bequeath unto Alonzo W. Hill of Vermontville Township, Eaton County, Michigan, the sum of Five Hundred ($500.00) Dollars.
>
> **THIRD:** I give, devise and bequeath all the rest, residue and remainder of my property, both real, personal and mixed, to my daughter, Winifred E. Wells, of the City of Charlotte, Michigan, without any qualifications or restrictions whatsoever, to be used and disposed of by her as she sees fit. Provided however, that in case my daughter, Winifred E. Wells, shall pre-decease me, then and in that event I give, devise and bequeath one-half of said residue of my estate to my sister, Alice Hallenbeck, and the remaining one-half of said residue to the following persons in the following proportions; namely, to Alice Parker, sister of my deceased husband, Clark Wells, one-fifth of said one-half; to Perry B. Wells, brother of my deceased husband, one-fifth; to Dalton Wells and Gladys Wells Holden, grand-children of George Wells, deceased brother of my husband, each one-tenth; to Carl B. Wells, Hazel M. Rickley, Violetta Purdy and Leola Vincent, children of Clayton H. Wells, deceased half-brother of Clark Wells, each two-twenty-fifths; and to Nellie Barningham, daughter of Clinton K. Wells, deceased half-brother of Clark Wells, two-twenty-fifths; it being my intention to divide said residue equally between my husband's and my sides of the family, but to the individuals and in the proportions named.
>
> **FOURTH:** I hereby nominate and appoint my daughter, Winifred E. Wells, as executrix of this, my last will and testament. Provided however, that in the event my daughter, Winifred E. Wells, pre-deceases me, then and in that case I nominate and appoint Lloyd H. Hill of Vermontville, Michigan, as executor of this, my last will and testament.
>
> **LASTLY:** I hereby revoke all former wills and codicils heretofore made by me.
>
> *(signed)*
> **Eltha L. Wells**

On this 22nd day of October, A.D. 1937, Eltha L. Wells of the City of Charlotte, Eaton County, Michigan, signed the foregoing instrument in the presence of us and each of us and declared it to be her last will and testament, and as witnesses thereto, we do now, at her request and in her presence, and in the presence of each other, subscribe our names.

Rose Andrea, of the City of Charlotte, Michigan
Homer L. Bower, of the City of Charlotte, Michigan

Filed Oct 22, 1942
Eileen Tiedgen, Register of Probate

Using AI to Build a Genealogical Proof Argument

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 8, 2026
Artificial Intelligence,Virginia
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/08/using-ai-to-build-a-genealogical-proof-argument/

A Look Behind the Scenes

If you've been following along on this blog, you know that I regularly use artificial intelligence tools as part of my genealogy workflow. Today's post pulls back the curtain a bit to show how I used ChatGPT to analyze a set of Augusta County, Virginia records and develop a genealogical proof argument.

Starting with the Records

Like many of my research projects, this one began with a document—or rather, a set of documents. Two deeds from 1798 identified the heirs of Samuel Craig. At first glance, the names seemed straightforward, but as is often the case in early records, the relationships were not explicitly stated.

Adding to the mix were two marriage entries from *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*. These entries provided critical clues, but they also introduced a potential point of confusion involving multiple Crawford men.

Step One: Transcription and Extraction

The first step in my process is always to understand the document. I transcribed the deeds and then asked ChatGPT to extract the family information. This is something I've come to rely on—having the AI pull out names, relationships, and patterns helps me see the structure of the record more clearly.

However, I never stop there. Extraction is just the beginning.

Step Two: Correlation

Once I had the extracted information, I introduced the marriage records. This is where the real work began. By asking ChatGPT to consider both the deeds and the marriages together, I was able to test assumptions and identify conflicts.

For example, the deeds included both John Crawford and Elizabeth Crawford. It would have been easy to assume they were husband and wife. But the marriage record clearly showed that Elizabeth Craig married Samuel Crawford. That single piece of evidence changed the interpretation of the entire document set.

Step Three: Asking Better Questions

One of the biggest lessons I've learned in using AI is that the quality of the output depends on the quality of the questions. Rather than asking ChatGPT to "tell me the answer," I asked it to:

- Reconstruct the family
- Identify inconsistencies
- Suggest alternative interpretations

This back-and-forth process feels very much like working with a research partner. Sometimes the AI suggests something I hadn't considered. Other times, I recognize that it has made an assumption that needs to be corrected.

Step Four: Building the Proof Argument

Once the relationships became clearer, I asked ChatGPT to draft a proof argument. Because I had already guided the analysis, the resulting narrative reflected the evidence I had assembled.

Even so, I reviewed and edited the argument carefully. AI can help organize and articulate a conclusion, but it is still my responsibility to ensure that the reasoning is sound and the evidence is accurately represented.

What AI Did—and Did Not Do

This project is a good example of what AI does well and where human judgment is still essential.

AI helped me:

- Extract information from complex legal language
- Organize multiple records into a coherent structure
- Draft a clear, readable proof argument

But I still had to:

- Provide the correct records
- Recognize when assumptions were being made
- Evaluate conflicting evidence
- Make the final genealogical conclusions

Why This Matters

Genealogy is not just about collecting names—it's about building accurate, well-supported conclusions. Tools like ChatGPT can make the process more efficient, but they don't replace the need for careful analysis.

For me, AI has become part of an ongoing workflow. It helps me move more quickly from document to interpretation, and from interpretation to narrative. But every conclusion still rests on the records themselves.

Final Thoughts

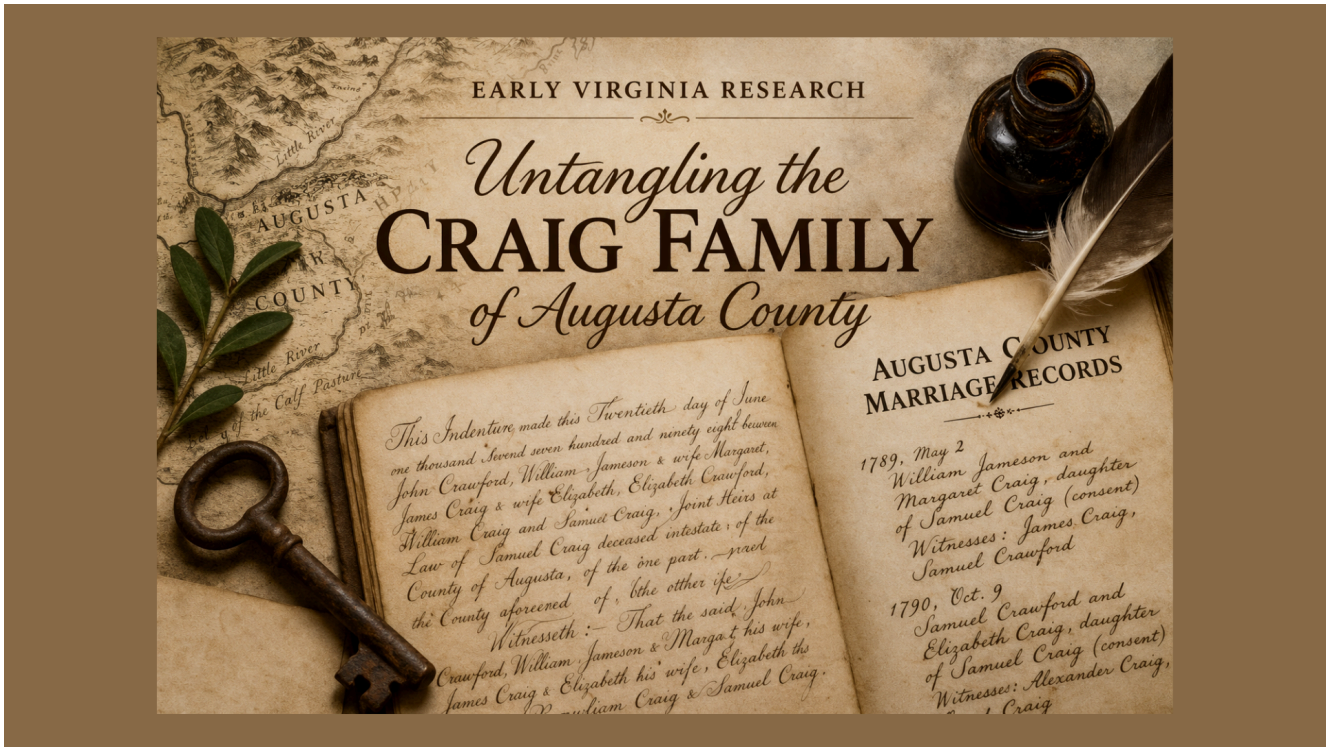
If you're hesitant about using AI in your research, I understand. I was cautious at first as well. But used thoughtfully, it can be a valuable tool—especially when working with complex records like these Augusta County deeds.

The key is to treat AI as an assistant, not an authority.

And as always in genealogy: follow the evidence.

The Crawford-Craig Connection in a Compiled Source

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 9, 2026
Augusta County,Crawford,Virginia
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/09/compiled-source/



What the Forbes Book Adds (and What It Doesn't)

As I continue working through the Craig and Crawford families of Augusta County, Virginia, I've been revisiting a familiar compiled source: *Descendants of Alexander & Mary McPheeters Crawford*. This book, compiled by Amanda Crawford Arbogast Forbes and Lucetta Crawford Sammis, is widely used in Crawford research—and for good reason.

But like all compiled genealogies, it raises an important question:

> What does this source actually prove—and how does it compare to the original records?

The Crawford Parents: A Well-Known Line

Before diving into the Craig connections, it's important to place Samuel and Martha Crawford within their family.

According to the Forbes compilation, both were children of:

- **Alexander Crawford**
- **Mary McPheeters**

This couple is well established in Augusta County, Virginia, and appears frequently in Crawford research. Their children include:

- Samuel Crawford (b. 1759; d. 1795)
- John Crawford
- William Crawford (d. 1792)
- Martha Crawford (b. ca. 1757/58; d. 1828)
- (and others not discussed here)

The identification of Samuel and Martha as siblings is clearly supported within the compiled work and aligns with other known Crawford research.

What the Forbes Book Says About the Craig Connections

The Forbes entries for Samuel Crawford and Martha Crawford provide several key pieces of information:

- **Samuel Crawford married Elizabeth Craig**, daughter of Samuel and Margaret Craig
- **Martha Crawford married Alexander Craig**, son of Samuel and Margaret Craig

This gives us two confirmed connections between the families:

- Crawford ↔ Craig (Samuel ↔ Elizabeth)
- Crawford ↔ Craig (Martha ↔ Alexander)

The book goes one step further and suggests a broader pattern:

> That Crawford siblings and Craig siblings intermarried across the two families

This interpretation is based on the relationships described in the text, particularly the statement that Alexander Craig was a brother of Elizabeth Craig, who married Samuel Crawford, “brother of his wife Martha.”

How This Compares to the Original Records

When we compare the Forbes book to the original records (deeds and marriage records), several important points emerge.

What the Records Confirm

The original records support key elements of the compiled narrative:

- The 1790 marriage record confirms:
  - Samuel Crawford married Elizabeth Craig
- The 1798 deeds confirm:
  - Elizabeth Crawford is an heir of Samuel Craig
  - Alexander Craig is also an heir
  - The Craig and Crawford families are closely connected through land transactions

Together, these align well with the relationships described in the Forbes book.

Where the Book Goes Further

However, the Forbes compilation also **extends beyond the direct evidence** in a few areas:

- It implies that **John Crawford** was part of the same sibling group and possibly married into the Craig family
- It presents the Craig–Crawford intermarriages as a broader, interconnected sibling network

While these conclusions are reasonable—and even likely—they are not fully documented in the original records currently in hand.

Using Compiled Sources Carefully

This is a great example of how compiled genealogies function in research.

The Forbes book:

✔ Provides valuable context
✔ Connects multiple records into a narrative
✔ Suggests relationships worth investigating

But it also:

⚠ Blends documented facts with informed interpretation
⚠ Does not always distinguish clearly between the two

A Balanced View of the Craig–Crawford Network

By combining the compiled source with original records, we can arrive at a careful, evidence-based understanding:

Supported by Both Sources

- Samuel Crawford (son of Alexander Crawford & Mary McPheeters) married Elizabeth Craig
- Martha Crawford (his sister) married Alexander Craig
- The Craig family (children of Samuel and Margaret Craig) appears as a cohesive group in 1798 deeds

Suggested by the Compiled Source

- Additional intermarriage between the families (e.g., John Crawford)
- A broader sibling-to-sibling network

Why This Matters

The Crawford–Craig connection is more than just an interesting family story—it's a reminder of how genealogy works.

- Original records give us **evidence**
- Compiled sources give us **interpretation**
- Good research requires us to **separate and evaluate both**

In this case, the Forbes book provides a helpful roadmap—but the deeds and marriage records allow us to test and refine that map.

Final Thoughts

I'll continue to use the Forbes compilation as part of this research—it's too valuable to ignore. But I'll also continue to ask:

- What does the book prove?
- What does it suggest?
- And what still needs to be documented?

Because in genealogy, the goal isn't just to build a family tree—it's to build one that rests on solid evidence.

Citation

Amanda Crawford Arbogast Forbes and Lucetta Crawford Sammis, comps., *Descendants of Alexander & Mary McPheeters Crawford: Pioneer Settlers of Augusta County, Virginia* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1980).

Friday Find: A Crawford Family Bible Record…But Not My Crawfords

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 10, 2026
Crawford,Kentucky
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/10/friday-find-113/

Do you ever come across a record that looks incredibly promising—only to realize it may not belong to *your* family at all?

This week's Friday Find is exactly that kind of discovery.

While digging through my Crawford Kentucky file, I found a photocopy of a **published collection of Bible records from Mercer County, Kentucky**, compiled by Alma Ray Sanders Ison in 1986. Beginning on the second page is a section labeled **"Crawford Bible,"** reportedly copied from a **Revolutionary War pension application for Thomas and Mary Crawford**.

At first glance, this looked like a goldmine.

But as I worked through the details, it became clear:
this is likely *not* my Crawford family.

What the Record Contains

The Crawford Bible record includes:

- A marriage entry for **Thomas Crawford and Mary Ewing (Feb. 28, 1783)**
- A series of marriages for individuals who appear to be their children or close relatives
- A detailed list of births for their children between 1783 and 1802

The children of Thomas and Mary Crawford include:

- Margaret (1783)
- Catharine (1785) – married William McElroy in 1811
- Elizabeth (1786) – married James Gilkerson in 1808 and William Wade in 1827
- Samuel (1787) – married Catherine Ewing in 1814
- Ann (1789) – married Reverend Nathaniel Hall in 1807
- Polly (1791)
- Thomas (1793) – married Rebecca Ewing in 1816
- John (1794) – married Sarah McElroy in 1817

- Margaret (1796)
- William (1798) – married Esther McElroy in 1825
- Mary (1800) – married Jacob Crow in 1830
- Cyrus (1802) – married Mahala Walker in 1837

The associated surnames—Ewing, McElroy, Gilkerson, Hall, Walker—suggest a well-connected Mercer County family with ties typical of early Kentucky settlers.

Why This *Isn't* My Crawford Family

As much as I would love to claim this family, my current research doesn't support a connection.

My Crawford research centers on **Garrard County, Kentucky**, along with earlier ties to Virginia. Through years of work, I've developed a FAN club that includes families such as:

- Anderson
- Maxwell
- Douglas

Those names do **not** appear in this Bible record.

Additionally:

- The geographic focus here is **Mercer County**, not Garrard
- The family structure and associated surnames don't align with what I know about my ancestor, **James Crawford**
- There is no clear overlap (yet) between this group and my established research network

At this point, I have to treat this as a **separate Crawford family**—one of many in early Kentucky.

So Why Keep the Record?

Because in genealogy, today's "not my family" can become tomorrow's breakthrough.

There are several reasons this record is still worth keeping:

- **Neighboring counties matter.** Mercer and Garrard counties are geographically close, and families often crossed county lines.
- **Surname overlap may emerge later.** Just because I don't recognize these names now doesn't mean they won't connect through marriage or migration patterns.
- **It provides context.** Understanding *other* Crawford families in Kentucky helps avoid mistaken identity—a constant risk in my research.
- **The Revolutionary War pension lead is valuable.** Even if this isn't my line, the original pension file could provide insight into Crawford migration patterns into Kentucky.

What This Record Teaches Me

This Friday Find is a good reminder of something every genealogist learns eventually:

> Not every record with your surname belongs in your tree—but it may still belong in your research.

In fact, identifying what *doesn't* fit can be just as important as finding what does.

Next Steps

Even though this family isn't part of my current FAN club, I'm not ignoring it. My next steps include:

- Locating the **original Revolutionary War pension application**
- Mapping this family in Mercer County records (land, tax, probate)
- Watching for any **future connections** to Garrard County Crawfords

---

Final Thoughts

This record may not solve my Crawford mystery—but it helps define the landscape.

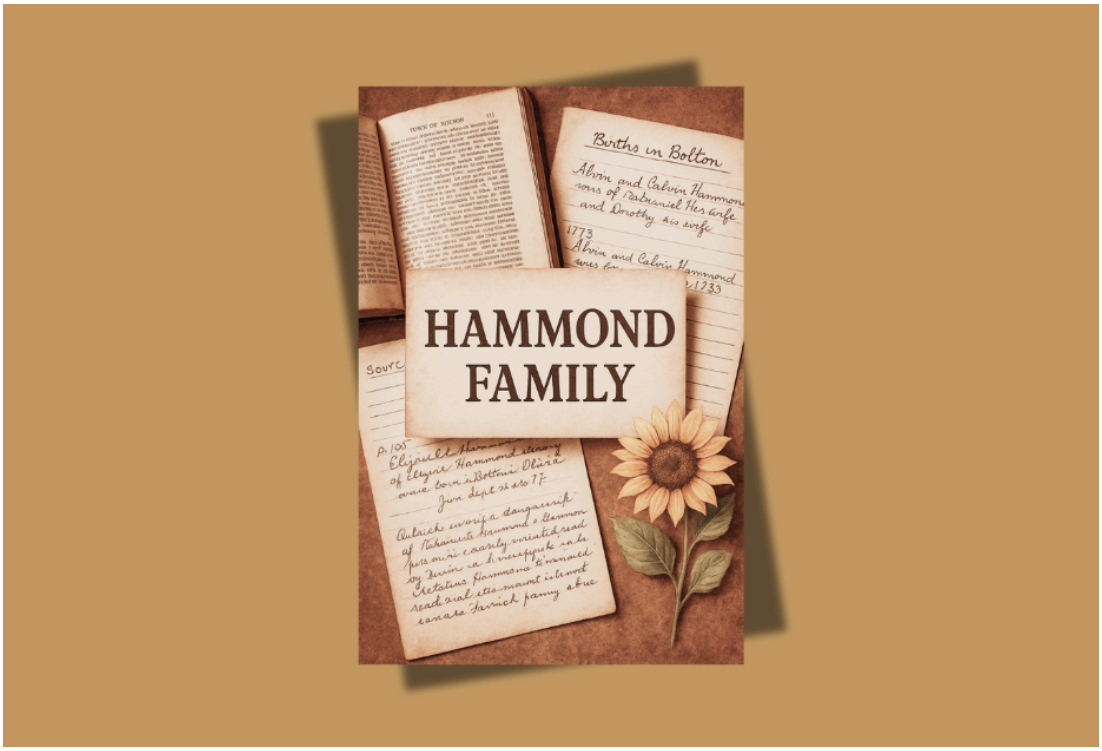
And sometimes, ruling a family *out* is just as valuable as proving one *in*.

Have you ever chased the wrong family—only to learn something useful anyway?

I'd love to hear about it!

Richmond Hammond's Civil War Service

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 11, 2026
Civil War,Hammond
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/11/richmond-hammonds-civil-war-service/



When researching our ancestors, we sometimes uncover stories that don't quite make sense at first glance. That was the case when I began digging into the Civil War service of my 2nd great grandfather, Richmond F. Hammond. One record labeled him a deserter—but as I pulled together additional records, a very different story began to emerge.

It's a good reminder that researching Civil War soldiers can appear straightforward—until it isn't. Richmond F. Hammond's military record is one of those situations where it takes multiple sources to uncover what really happened.

Using compiled military records for the **17th Illinois Infantry**, **102nd Illinois Infantry**, and **14th Illinois Cavalry**, along with his **pension file**, a more complete picture of his service begins to emerge.

Enlistment and Early Service

Richmond F. Hammond first enlisted on **25 May 1861** in the **17th Illinois Infantry**.

This places him among the early volunteers who answered the call at the beginning of the Civil War. Like many soldiers in these early regiments, his service would not follow a simple, uninterrupted path.

A Pattern of Re-Enlistment

At some point after his initial service, Richmond later appears in the records of the **102nd Illinois Infantry**, indicating a second period of enlistment.

However, it is his service in the **14th Illinois Cavalry**—beginning in **September 1862**—that becomes the most well-documented and significant portion of his military career.

The pension file helps connect these separate records, showing that rather than representing unrelated individuals, they reflect **multiple enlistments by the same man**.

The Question of Desertion

One of the most confusing aspects of Richmond Hammond's military record is the appearance of a **desertion notation** in the compiled service records.

Taken alone, such a notation could suggest that he abandoned his service.

However, the pension file tells a different story.

Affidavits within the file explain that Richmond:

- Left one unit
- But quickly reenlisted in another
- Continued serving throughout the war

These statements, supported by multiple witnesses, indicate that his service was **continuous in practice**, even if irregular in documentation.

Rather than desertion in the traditional sense, the record reflects the **complex realities of Civil War enlistments**, where transfers, re-enlistments, and gaps in paperwork were not uncommon.

Service in the 14th Illinois Cavalry

Richmond's most sustained service appears to have been with **Company D, 14th Illinois Cavalry**.

This regiment operated extensively in the Western Theater, including Tennessee and Georgia—areas that would soon shape Richmond's wartime experience in a profound way.

Capture and Imprisonment

In **August 1864**, near **Atlanta, Georgia**, Richmond was **captured by Confederate forces**.

His pension file includes references to prisoner-of-war records, confirming that he was held in Confederate prisons.

Although the pension file does not always name each location explicitly, his experience aligns with known movements of Union prisoners at that time, likely including camps such as Andersonville, Charleston, or Florence.

The Lasting Effects of War

The pension file provides the most detailed and personal insight into Richmond's service—not in terms of battles, but in terms of **its lasting impact**.

In his declarations and supporting affidavits, Richmond reported chronic health problems that began during his service and imprisonment, including:

- Chronic diarrhea
- Rheumatism
- Heart and lung issues
- General physical weakness

Physicians and witnesses consistently attributed these conditions to:

- Exposure during military service
- Hardships endured as a prisoner of war

These records make clear that Richmond did not leave the war behind in 1865.

Muster Out and Aftermath

Richmond Hammond was **mustered out on 16 June 1865**, at the close of the war.

But like many veterans—especially former prisoners—his struggles continued long after his discharge.

His pension file documents years of declining health, limited ability to work, and increasing reliance on government support.

A Life Shaped by Service

By the end of his life, Richmond was a resident of the **National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers**, where he died on **8 April 1928**.

His military record, when viewed across multiple sources, tells a story that is both complex and deeply human.

Bringing the Records Together

Individually, the records of the 17th Illinois Infantry, 102nd Illinois Infantry, and 14th Illinois Cavalry raise questions.

Together—with the addition of the pension file—they provide answers.

They reveal a man who:

- Enlisted early
- Served in multiple units
- Continued serving despite irregularities in the record
- Endured capture and imprisonment
- Carried the physical consequences of war for the rest of his life

---

Final Thoughts

Richmond F. Hammond's military service is not a simple story—and that is precisely what makes it valuable.

It reminds us that Civil War records do not always tell the full story on their own.
Sometimes, it takes multiple sources—read together—to uncover the truth.

And in Richmond's case, that truth is clear:

He served.

Richmond F. Hammond's Civil War service reminds me why we can't stop with just one record. What began as a question about a "desertion" ended with the story of a man who reenlisted, served, was captured, and lived with the effects of that experience for the rest of his life. By pulling multiple sources together, I didn't just clarify his record—I came closer to understanding the life of my 2nd great grandfather.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 12, 2026
Currey,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/12/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-196/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again –
Time for some more Genealogy Fun!!

Here is your assignment if you choose to play along (cue the Mission Impossible music, please!):

1. Do you have an ancestor with no defined birth and death dates or places?
2. This week, please tell us about that ancestor and what clues you used to estimate a birth and death dates and places.

One ancestor in my tree who fits this prompt perfectly is **Hiram Mirick Currey**, an early Baptist preacher, educator, politician, and eventually **Treasurer of the State of Ohio**.

At first glance, Hiram seems fairly well documented. He appears in tax lists, church records, land transactions, and state government records. But when it comes to the basics—his exact **birth and death details**—those remain frustratingly unclear.

Estimating His Birth

The earliest clue I have for Hiram is his appearance in the **1783 census of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania**, where he was listed as "Myrack Curry" with one white male in the household. Since he was clearly being counted as a head of household, that suggests he was already an adult by that date.

Because of that record, I can only say that Hiram was likely **born before about 1762**. That is not a precise date, but it is a reasonable estimate based on the evidence currently available.

A few years later, he appears again:

- **1786** – on the tax rolls in **Fayette County, Pennsylvania**

Those early Pennsylvania records help place him geographically before his later moves west.

Following Him Across the Frontier

By the 1790s, Hiram had moved to **Mason County, Kentucky**, where he was a **Baptist preacher and teacher** in Mays Lick. He appeared regularly on tax lists, owned land, witnessed a will, and served as a messenger to Baptist association meetings. Those records show him as an active part of that early Kentucky community.

By the early 1800s, Hiram had moved on to **Ohio**, where he continued to leave a trail in the records. In **Champaign County**, he performed marriages, preached, taught school, and helped build up the community. His public service later expanded into politics, and he served as both a **state senator** and a **member of the Ohio House of Representatives**.

In **1816**, he became **Treasurer of the State of Ohio**, placing him in the middle of an important and controversial period in Ohio's financial history.

Clues to His Death

His death is just as uncertain as his birth.

What I do know is that Hiram continued to appear in records for many years:

- **1830** – listed in **Tippecanoe County, Indiana**
- **1838–1839** – still conducting religious services in Indiana

Those records tell me that he was still living after 1839. Since I have not found a death record or burial record for him, all I can currently say is that he **died sometime after 1839**, probably in **Indiana**.

Putting the Clues Together

So, based on the evidence I have now, my working estimate for Hiram Mirick Currey is:

- **Born:** before about 1762, likely in **Pennsylvania**
- **Died:** after 1839, probably in **Indiana**

That may not be as satisfying as a precise date and place, but it is enough to begin telling his story. And what a story it is. Hiram was a preacher, teacher, legislator, and state treasurer. Even without exact birth and death information, the surviving records show that he lived a long and active life on the early American frontier.

For me, this is a good reminder that genealogy is not always about finding one perfect record. Sometimes it is about gathering small clues from many different sources and using them to build the best timeline possible.

Now it's your turn—
Do you have an ancestor with no defined birth and death dates or places? What clues helped you estimate their timeline?

Monday's Diggings – Two Marriages from my WELLS folder

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 13, 2026
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/13/mondays-diggings-30/

Do you have documents tucked away in your files that you obtained years ago—but haven't fully revisited?

That was the case for me as I pulled out my **WELLS folder** and found two marriage records from **Calhoun County, Michigan**. Based on the format and certification stamps, I'm fairly certain I requested these directly from the county years ago. At the time, they were important enough to save—but not fully analyzed or incorporated into my research.

Now, taking a fresh look, these two records provide valuable insight into the family of **Benjamin Franklin Wells** and his sister **Nancy Wells**.

Marriage of Benjamin Franklin Wells (1848)

The first record documents the marriage of:

Benjamin Franklin Wells and **Ann Maria Benham**
30 April 1848, Clarence, Calhoun County, Michigan

The record states that Benjamin was **29 years old** and Ann Maria was **23 years old**, both residents of Clarence. They were married by **E. Murphy Hicks, Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church**, in the presence of **Erasmus Edgerton** and **Hiram Buck**, both of Marshall.

The marriage was recorded on **17 May 1848** by County Clerk John Machin.

This record helps anchor Benjamin in both time and place and confirms his early residence in Clarence Township. It also places him within a Methodist community, which may offer additional avenues for church records.

Marriage of Nancy Wells (1856)

The second record documents the marriage of:

Nancy Wells and **James DeLottier**
4 January 1856, Calhoun County, Michigan

James DeLottier, age **40**, and Nancy Wells, both of **Clarence**, were married by **J. Whitall, Minister**. Witnesses to the marriage were **Lima Rouge** and **Isaac DeLottier**.

The record was received and recorded on **12 March 1856**.

This record is especially important because Nancy appears to be part of the same Wells family as Benjamin. The shared location of Clarence strongly suggests a sibling relationship—one that fits well with what I already know about this family.

Why These Records Matter

At first glance, these are simple marriage records—but together, they tell a larger story:

- They place multiple members of the Wells family in **Clarence Township, Calhoun County, Michigan**
- They help establish a **timeline of family settlement and growth** in the area
- They provide **associates and witnesses**, who may represent extended family or community ties
- They reinforce the connection between **Benjamin Wells and Nancy Wells as likely siblings**

Most importantly, they are a reminder that even records we gathered long ago can still yield new insights when viewed with fresh eyes.

A Reminder to Revisit Old Files

These documents had been sitting quietly in my files for years. Revisiting them not only confirmed key facts but also helped strengthen family connections.

If you've been researching for any length of time, chances are you have similar treasures waiting to be rediscovered.

What might you find if you took another look?

A Different Look at Richmond Hammond's Military Career

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 14, 2026
ABC Biography,Artificial Intelligence,Hammond
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/14/richmond-hammond/

What is your learning style? Do you prefer videos or the written word?

I have to admit—I've always preferred the written word when learning something new. There's something about being able to read, re-read, and process information at my own pace that works best for me. But recently, using AI tools to create songs, audio overviews, and even videos has shown me that an ancestor's story can be told in far more ways than I once imagined.

Thanks to the work of Randy Seaver of *Genea-Musings*, I've been experimenting with tools like Suno and Google NotebookLM to create songs and audio summaries of my research. However, it was a Facebook post by Diane Henriks in the *Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence* group that encouraged me to take a closer look at something new. In her post, *Bringing Ancestors to Life*, she highlighted a feature I hadn't explored yet: **Cinematic Video Overview**.

Having recently worked with ChatGPT to extract both military and genealogical details from my 2nd great grandfather Richmond Hammond's Civil War and pension records, I decided to see what Google NotebookLM could do with the same material.

Instead of giving it a clean transcription, I uploaded a **259-page PDF of the original pension file—handwritten documents and all**. No transcription. No cleanup.

What happened next was honestly amazing.

NotebookLM was able to interpret those handwritten images and produce:

- A **cinematic video overview**
- An **audio overview**
- And an **infographic**

Each output presented Richmond's story in a different format—and each added something unique.

From there, I took things a step further.

I combined the **audio overview** with the **infographic** to create one video. I also paired a feature image created in ChatGPT (based on Richmond's photograph) with a song created in Suno using lyrics composed by ChatGPT about his Civil War service to produce another.

The result?

Three completely different videos, all telling the story of Richmond Hammond—his Civil War service, his imprisonment, and the long-term impact of that experience—each in its own way.

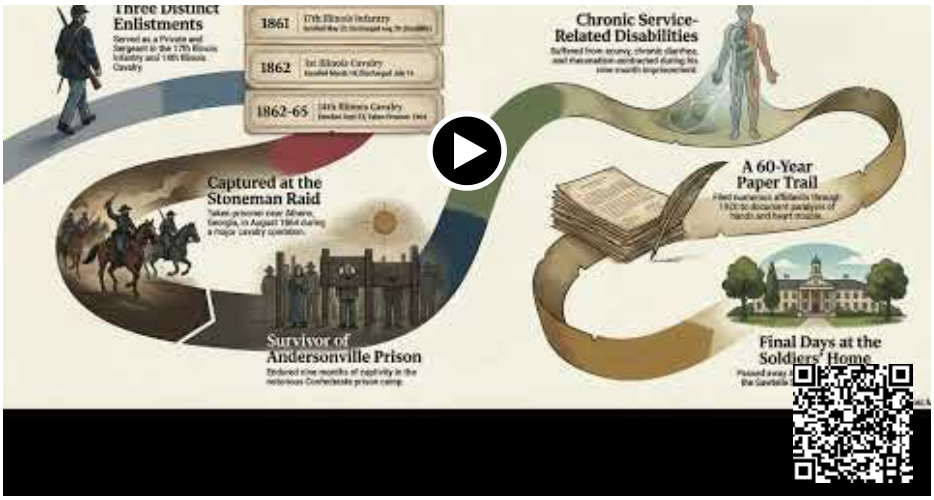
This process reminded me that storytelling in genealogy doesn't have to be limited to text. Whether it's a blog post, a song, an infographic, or a cinematic video, each format reaches people differently—and sometimes, combining them brings an ancestor's story to life in ways we never expected.

Cinematic Video – created by Google NotebookLM

https://youtube.com/watch?v=JQKKQ9r_qtI

Audio Overview and Infographic (created by GoogleNotebook LM)

https://youtube.com/watch?v=G9VB6QjcssA

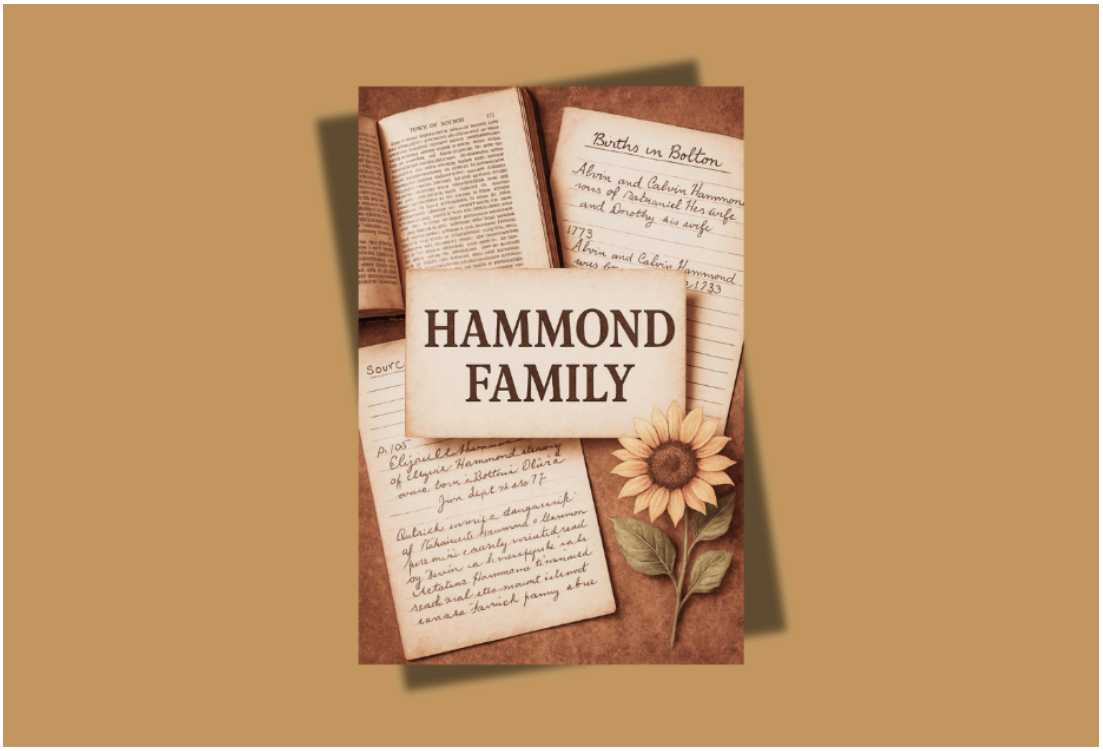


Song – Lyrics written by ChatGPT, image created by ChatGPT, song created by Suno.com

https://youtube.com/watch?v=ZSACht1N1b4

A Family Reconstructed from a Pension File

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 15, 2026
Hammond
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/15/a-family-reconstructed-from-a-pension-file/



Introduction

Do you have records that you originally used for one purpose, only to discover they contain much more information than you first realized?

That was the case when I revisited the pension file of my 2nd great grandfather, Richmond F. Hammond. While I initially focused on his Civil War service, a closer look revealed something just as valuable—clear genealogical information about his wives, children, and extended family.

A Pension File Rich in Family Details

Civil War pension files are well known for documenting a veteran's service and health. However, they can also contain key genealogical details, especially when a veteran applied for benefits or when a widow or dependent needed to prove a relationship.

In Richmond's case, the file helps reconstruct his family across several decades and multiple locations—from Illinois to Kansas and eventually to California.

Marriage to Sarah Ellen Ralston

The pension file confirms that Richmond married **Sarah Ellen Ralston** on **1 January 1867 in Knoxville, Knox County, Illinois**.

Sarah was the daughter of **James Barr Ralston** and **Nancy Jane McCormick**, providing an important connection to the Ralston and McCormick families.

This marriage took place shortly after Richmond's Civil War service, marking the beginning of his post-war family life.

Children of Richmond and Sarah (Ralston) Hammond

The pension file and supporting documentation identify the children of Richmond and Sarah:

- **William R. R. Hammond**, born 1 January 1864
- **Homer L. Hammond**, born 25 July 1865
- **Judson F. E. Hammond**, born 15 April 1866
- **Estella Mabel Hammond**, born 6 February 1868, Illinois; married William P. Root; died 1949
- **Forrest Clinton Hammond**, born 28 November 1868; died 1905 in Dodge City, Kansas
- **Nellie Elida Hammond**, born 23 November 1871; married Homer L. Bleecker; died 1956
- **Josie Winifred Hammond**, born 9 February 1874; married Judson Foster Crawford; died 1954
- **Glenn M. Hammond**, born 4 September 1877; died 11 February 1878
- **Clyde Nelson Hammond**, born 11 June 1879, Iowa; married Minnie L. Connell; died 1960

These records not only identify the children but also connect them to later marriages and locations, helping track the family into the next generation.

A Second Marriage: Mary McClure

After Sarah's death in 1892, Richmond married **Mary McClure** on **7 November 1897 in Dodge City, Kansas**.

Mary was born **9 October 1857** and died **14 March 1901** in Dodge City, where she was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery.

This second marriage represents Richmond's continued life in Kansas during the late 19th century.

A Daughter from the Second Marriage

Richmond and Mary McClure had one child:

- **Hattie Louisa Hammond**, born March 1899 in Kansas
  - Married Ralph E. Pate in 1917
  - Died 26 September 1994 in California

Hattie's life reflects the continued westward movement of the family into California.

A Third Marriage

The pension file also documents Richmond's third marriage to **Mary A. Grim** on **29 October 1906 in Kinsley, Kansas**.

This later marriage is important for understanding his household in the early 20th century and helps explain later census records.

Final Years

The pension file confirms that Richmond spent his later years in California, where he died on **8 April 1928** and was buried in **Los Angeles National Cemetery**.

This final detail ties together the family's migration from Ohio to Illinois, Kansas, and ultimately California.

Conclusion

What began as a search for military service details turned into something much more meaningful. Richmond Hammond's pension file doesn't just document his Civil War experience—it helps reconstruct his entire family.

From marriages and children to migrations across multiple states, the file provides a framework for understanding his life and the lives of those around him.

It's a good reminder that sometimes the most valuable genealogical information is found in records we thought we had already fully explored.

WikiTree Connect-a-Thon

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 16, 2026
Crawford,WikiTree
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/16/wikitree-connect-a-thon-2/

Are you a WikiTree user? If so, how much of your tree is actually represented there?

While I have most of my RootsMagic database linked to the FamilySearch tree and reflected in my public tree on Ancestry, I have to admit that only a small portion of that work has made its way onto WikiTree's collaborative tree.

Those missing profiles are exactly why I signed up for my second WikiTree Connect-A-Thon.

Going into the weekend, I had a clear goal: add the deceased descendants of my 4th great-grandfather, James Crawford. I wanted to focus specifically on the lines that had not yet been represented, helping to connect more of my family to the larger, shared tree.

However, the weekend didn't unfold quite as planned.

Mother Nature had other ideas. Heavy rains to our south on Thursday and Friday turned our normally calm river into a raging torrent. That surge of water damaged a regional fiber line, knocking out both our internet and cell service just for most of Saturday.

Thankfully, I had prepared ahead of time.

Before the Connect-A-Thon began, I created narrative reports for the deceased descendants of James's son, Nelson G. Crawford, who were missing from WikiTree. With those reports in hand, I was still able to make steady progress—even offline for part of the weekend.

By the end of the event, I had added 121 new profiles—primarily 2nd and 3rd cousins—to the collaborative tree. It was a satisfying reminder that preparation pays off, even when circumstances don't cooperate.

And I wasn't working alone. As part of the Tree Nuts team, we collectively added an impressive 2,301 profiles over the weekend. That shared effort is what makes events like the Connect-A-Thon so rewarding—each small contribution helping to grow a single, global family tree.

So, I'm marking my calendar for the next Connect-A-Thon, July 17-20.

Friday Finding: A Mystery – Polly Crawford, Orphan of 1816

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 17, 2026
Crawford,Garrard County,Kentucky
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/17/friday-finding/

How broadly do you research? Do you stick strictly to your known family lines—or do you take notes on *everyone* with the same surname in a particular place?

Over the years, I've definitely leaned toward the second approach. If a record mentions a surname I'm researching in a specific location, I save it. That habit has left me with a collection of notes about people I can't yet connect—but every now and then, one of those records deserves a closer look.

Today's Friday Find comes from my *Crawford Kentucky* folder. It's a brief but meaningful 1816 court entry from Garrard County—a guardianship record for Polly Crawford.

Transcription

Polly Crawford infant orphan of John Crawford
came into court and made choice of James H.
Moore as her guardian. Whereupon he
executed bond in the penalty of 1000.00
together with D. Mon Boyer and Thomas
Kennedy his security conditioned by the
law directs.

Oct Court 1816

Even though this is a short record, it provides several important clues:

- Polly Crawford was the **daughter of John Crawford**
- She was a **minor (under age 21)** in October 1816
- She appeared in **Garrard County Court** to choose her own guardian
- She selected **James H. Moore** as guardian
- A **$1,000 bond** was posted, with **D. Mon Boyer and Thomas Kennedy** as securities

That last detail is particularly interesting. Bondsmen were often relatives, neighbors, or close associates—so these names may be part of Polly's extended network.

At this point, however, Polly remains a mystery to me. I don't yet know which Crawford family she belongs to, nor do I know anything about her father John beyond the fact that he died before October 1816.

The only familiar name in the record is **Thomas Kennedy**, who I recognize as a significant landowner in southeastern Garrard County. That connection may—or may not—prove useful.

Thanks to FamilySearch's full-text search, this record is now easily accessible online:

Citation:
"Garrard, Kentucky, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9PK-C3ZL-1?view=explore : accessed 5 April 2026), image 92 of 637; Image Group Number 007646900.

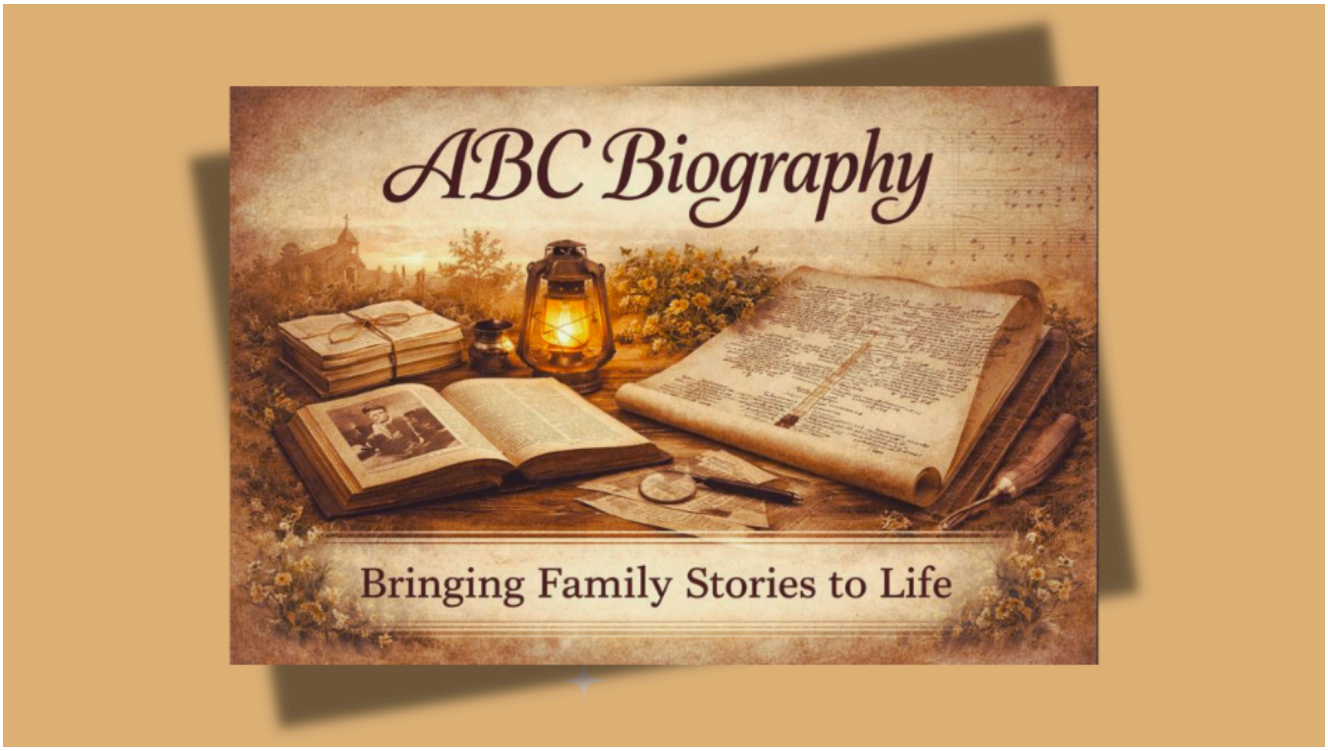
This is one of those records that sits in my files waiting for context. Perhaps Polly belongs to a Crawford line I haven't yet connected—or perhaps she represents an entirely different family.

So I'll put this one out to the genealogy community: **Does anyone recognize Polly Crawford or her father John Crawford in Garrard County, Kentucky, around 1816?**

Sometimes, sharing the mystery is the first step toward solving it.

Richmond Fisk Hammond

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 18, 2026
ABC Biography,Hammond
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/18/richmond-fisk-hammond/



A Life of Service, Family, and Resilience

Introduction

How do we truly understand the life of an ancestor?

For my 2nd great grandfather, Richmond Fisk Hammond, the answer comes from weaving together records—military, census, and family sources—into a story that spans from Ohio to Kansas and finally to California. His life reflects not only the experiences of one man, but also the broader story of 19th-century America.

Early Life and Family

Richmond Fisk Hammond was born on **20 November 1840 in Ohio**, the son of **Horatio Hammond** and **Louisa Fisk**.

He grew up in a large family, one of eleven children. His siblings included Amelia, Juliett, George, Francis, Jehiel, Lucius, John, Cornelius, Louisa, and Mary. Several of his siblings died young, a reminder of the realities of life in the mid-1800s.

By 1860, the Hammond family had moved west to Illinois, part of the larger migration pattern that brought many families from the eastern states into the Midwest.

Civil War Service

Richmond came of age during one of the most defining events in American history—the Civil War.

He first enlisted in **May 1861** in the 17th Illinois Infantry. After a short period of service and discharge, he reenlisted multiple times, eventually joining the **14th Illinois Cavalry**, where he served most of his military career.

During the **Atlanta Campaign in August 1864**, Richmond was captured by Confederate forces. He spent months as a prisoner of war before being paroled in early 1865 and returning to Union lines.

Like many veterans, his wartime experiences did not end with the war. His later pension records show that the hardships he endured—particularly during imprisonment—affected his health for the rest of his life.

Marriage and Children

Shortly after the war, Richmond married **Sarah Ellen Ralston** on **1 January 1867 in Knoxville, Illinois**. Sarah was the daughter of James Barr Ralston and Nancy Jane McCormick.

Together, Richmond and Sarah had a large family:

- William R. R. Hammond
- Homer L. Hammond
- Judson F. E. Hammond
- Estella Mabel Hammond
- Forrest Clinton Hammond
- Nellie Elida Hammond
- Josie Winifred Hammond
- Glenn M. Hammond
- Clyde Nelson Hammond

Their family grew during years of movement and settlement, first in Illinois and later in Iowa and Kansas.

After Sarah's death in 1892, Richmond married **Mary McClure** in 1897 in Dodge City, Kansas. They had one daughter, **Hattie Louisa Hammond**.

Following Mary's death in 1901, Richmond married a third time to **Mary A. Grim** in 1906.

Life in Kansas

Richmond eventually settled in **Dodge City, Kansas**, where he worked as a farmer and became part of the growing community.

This was a period of transition for Dodge City—from a frontier cattle town into a more stable agricultural region. Richmond's life there reflects that shift. He filed land claims, helped build local infrastructure, and participated in community life.

He was also active in the **Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.)**, an organization of Union veterans, and even served as a post commander—an indication of the respect he earned from fellow veterans.

Later Years in California

In his later years, Richmond moved west once again, this time to **California**. He eventually became a resident of the **National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers** in Sawtelle, near Los Angeles.

These homes were established to care for aging Civil War veterans, many of whom, like Richmond, continued to suffer from the effects of their service.

Death and Burial

Richmond Fisk Hammond died on **8 April 1928** in Sawtelle, Los Angeles County, California, at the age of 87.

He was buried in **Los Angeles National Cemetery**, a fitting resting place for a man whose life was shaped by his service during the Civil War.

Conclusion

Richmond Fisk Hammond's life tells a story of movement, service, and endurance. From Ohio to Illinois, from the battlefields of the Civil War to the plains of Kansas, and finally to California, his journey reflects the experiences of a generation.

Through the records he left behind, we can see more than just dates and places—we can see a life lived through challenge and change, and a legacy carried forward through his family.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 19, 2026
Crawford,Kentucky,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/19/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-197/

Unexpected Clues in a Kentucky Land Entry

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's **Saturday Night again** —
time for some more **Genealogy Fun!!**

Here is your assignment if you choose to play along (cue the *Mission Impossible* music, please!):

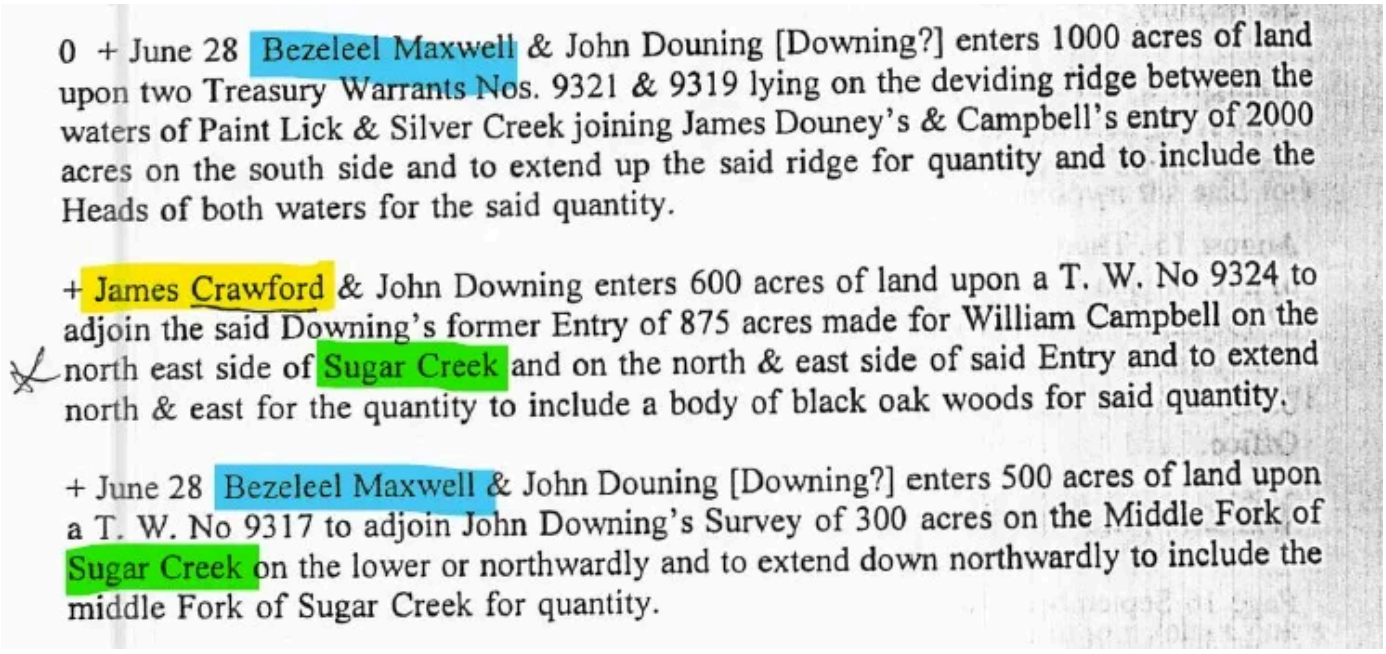
1. Have you found an unexpected record recently (or at any time) in your genealogy and family history research? A document, a book, an article, a letter, etc.?
2. This week, please tell us about that unexpected record find and how it helped your research.
3. Share your unexpected record find and how it helped your research with us in your own blog post, by writing a comment on this blog post, or by posting it on Substack, Facebook, or another social media platform. Please leave a comment here so others can find it!

While I likely have several "unexpected" finds that have helped my research over the years, none immediately came to mind this week. So instead, I'm going to write about a record I am currently **revisiting**—one that *may* turn into an unexpected breakthrough.

As I've been working back through my paper files (yes, those *old* folders that still hold treasures!), I came across a photocopy from the book *Land Entries for Madison County, Kentucky, 1780–1793*.

At the time I made this copy, I was clearly in "broad search mode," gathering information on **any and all men named James Crawford** in Madison, Garrard, and Lincoln counties prior to 1810. One entry caught my attention:

- **James Crawford and John Downing – 600 acres**



0 + June 28 Bezeleel Maxwell & John Douning [Downing?] enters 1000 acres of land upon two Treasury Warrants Nos. 9321 & 9319 lying on the deviding ridge between the waters of Paint Lick & Silver Creek joining James Douney's & Campbell's entry of 2000 acres on the south side and to extend up the said ridge for quantity and to include the Heads of both waters for the said quantity.

+ James Crawford & John Downing enters 600 acres of land upon a T. W. No 9324 to adjoin the said Downing's former Entry of 875 acres made for William Campbell on the north east side of Sugar Creek and on the north & east side of said Entry and to extend north & east for the quantity to include a body of black oak woods for said quantity.

+ June 28 Bezeleel Maxwell & John Douning [Downing?] enters 500 acres of land upon a T. W. No 9317 to adjoin John Downing's Survey of 300 acres on the Middle Fork of Sugar Creek on the lower or northwardly and to extend down northwardly to include the middle Fork of Sugar Creek for quantity.

At first glance, it's just a brief abstract—hardly enough to draw firm conclusions. And so far, I haven't been able to locate the original land entry, survey, or patent associated with this record. Without those original documents, it's difficult to fully understand the context of the transaction.

But as genealogists know, even the smallest clue can open new doors.

Looking for Clues

There are several intriguing details in this short entry:

- The **James Crawford** could be the James Crawford (1758–1836) who married Rebecca Anderson and lived along Paint Lick Creek in what became Garrard County.
- His brother-in-law, **Bezaleel Maxwell (1751–1828)**, may be the same man named in two additional entries on the page.
- And then there's the recurring name: **John Downing**—appearing in all three transactions.

That last name is the one that really caught my attention.

A New FAN Club Lead

When I ran a broader search using "John Downing" along with Crawford in early Virginia records, I began to find references in Augusta County and Louisa County.

Now *that* is interesting.

If this John Downing is part of the same network of families migrating into Kentucky, then he may represent a **missing link in my FAN club research**—connecting the Kentucky Crawfords back to their Virginia origins.

Why This Matters

Right now, this land entry is more of a **possibility than proof**. I still need to:

- Locate the original land entry or survey
- Determine the warrant type and location
- Map the land and identify neighbors
- Confirm whether these individuals are indeed part of my Crawford network

But even without those answers, this record has already done something important—it has **expanded my research path**.

Final Thoughts

This is exactly why I love revisiting old research.

A record that once seemed like just another name on a page can, years later, become the key to a new line of inquiry. Whether or not this particular entry leads to a breakthrough, it has already introduced a new surname—**Downing**—into my search for the origins of my Kentucky Crawford families.

And sometimes, that's all it takes to move a brick wall just a little bit further.

I'd love to hear about *your* unexpected finds—past or present. What record surprised you, and where did it lead?

Monday's Diggings – Wells Chancery Record

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 20, 2026
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/20/mondays-diggings-wells-chancery-record/

Do you have documents in your files that you *know* are important… but you don't quite remember how you obtained them?

That was me this week as I dug into my **WELLS research folder**.

Tucked inside was a multi-page chancery case from **Eaton County, Michigan**, involving **Thurston K. Wells vs. John Graham (1859)**. The document clearly had value—it included a court decree, land description, sale report, and even a publisher's affidavit—but there was one problem:

👉 I didn't remember exactly where it came from.

📬 Following the Paper Trail (Literally!)

Fortunately, one page in the file held the answer.

Included with the chancery papers was a **letter I wrote dated 10 March 1998** to the Eaton County Clerk. In that letter, I asked about obtaining a copy of a chancery sale referenced in:

> *Eaton County Michigan Newspapers, Volume 1 (1845–1867), page 69*

That one page told me everything I needed to know about the document's origin:

- I had found a **published reference** to the case
- I wrote directly to the county courthouse
- The clerk responded by sending copies of the full chancery file

👉 Mystery solved—this wasn't a random find. It was the result of **targeted research and good old-fashioned correspondence**.

⚖️ What the Case Reveals

The case itself is a classic foreclosure story:

- **Thurston K. Wells** held a mortgage on land owned by **John Graham**

- In **May 1859**, the court ruled that Graham owed:
  - **$1,338.11** (principal + interest)
- When the debt wasn't paid, the court ordered the property sold

The land—**80 acres in Eaton County**—was auctioned later that year.

- Sale price: **$1,500**
- Buyer: **Charles Tenney of Clinton County, Michigan**

At first glance, it looks like the debt should have been satisfied.

But that's where the story gets interesting.

💰 When the Numbers Don't Add Up

After reviewing all pages of the file, I reconstructed the financial outcome:

- Total due at time of sale (with interest and costs): **~$1,568**
- Sale proceeds: **$1,500**

But after deducting:

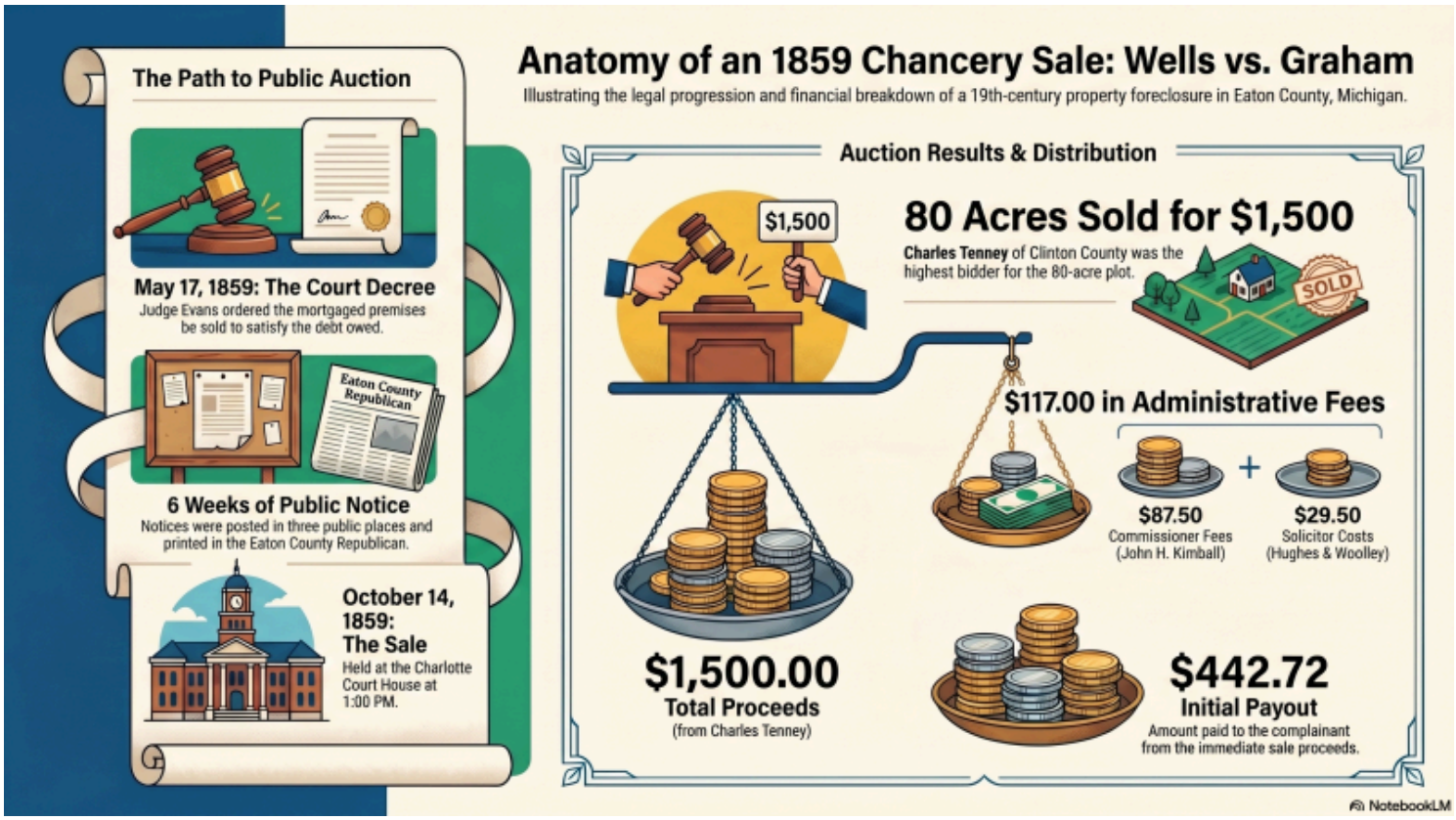
- Legal fees
- Court costs
- Commissioner's fees

Only **$442.72** was actually applied toward the debt.

👉 The result?

> **A remaining deficiency of $1,039.17**

In other words, even after losing his land, **John Graham still owed money**.


Anatomy of an 1859 Chancery Sale: Wells vs. Graham
Illustrating the legal progression and financial breakdown of a 19th-century property foreclosure in Eaton County, Michigan.
The Path to Public Auction
May 17, 1859: The Court Decree
Judge Evans ordered the mortgaged premises be sold to satisfy the debt owed.
Eaton County Republican
6 Weeks of Public Notice
Notices were posted in three public places and printed in the Eaton County Republican.
October 14, 1859: The Sale
Held at the Charlotte Court House at 1:00 PM.
Auction Results & Distribution
$1,500
80 Acres Sold for $1,500
Charles Tenney of Clinton County was the highest bidder for the 80-acre plot.
SOLD
$117.00 in Administrative Fees
$87.50
Commissioner Fees (John H. Kimball)
+
$29.50
Solicitor Costs (Hughes & Woolley)
$1,500.00
Total Proceeds
(from Charles Tenney)
$442.72
Initial Payout
Amount paid to the complainant from the immediate sale proceeds.
NotebookLM

🔍 Why This Matters

This document gives us more than just a land description—it provides insight into:

- **Financial relationships** (Wells as lender, not just landowner)
- **Economic realities** in 1859 Michigan
- The **true cost of foreclosure**, where legal expenses could consume much of the proceeds

It also reminds me that:

👉 Not every land transaction ends neatly in a deed book.
👉 Sometimes, the real story is in the court records.

🧠 A Digging Reminder

This find also reinforced an important research habit:

- Don't ignore the **"extra pages"** in your files
- Old correspondence can be just as valuable as the records themselves
- Always look for clues about **how you obtained a document**

In this case, a simple letter from 1998 turned a confusing file into a **fully sourced and understood record set**.

📌 Final Thoughts

This chancery case sat quietly in my WELLS folder for years.

Now, after revisiting it, I not only understand the document—I understand the **story behind it**:

- A loan that wasn't repaid
- A farm that was lost
- And a debt that lingered even after the sale

And perhaps most importantly…

👉 A reminder that some of our best finds come from research we did decades ago.

Would you have looked twice at a document like this in your files?

Sharing AI Stories beyond the Blog

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 21, 2026
ABC Biography,Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/21/sharing-ai-stories-beyond-the-blog/

Using AI (and AI Advice!) to Share Family Stories with Cousins

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's time for a little more genealogy fun—this time with a practical twist!

Over the past several months, I've been using Randy Seaver's ABC Biography process (from Genea-Musings) along with AI tools to create narrative biographies, songs, and videos about my ancestors. I've been sharing those stories here on *Heartland Genealogy*, but that led me to an important question:

> *Am I actually reaching the people who would care the most—my 3rd and 4th cousins?*

So, I turned to AI for help.

The Question I Asked

Here is the exact prompt I used:

> *I've used Randy Seaver's ABC Biography process to use AI to create narrative biographies, songs and videos about my ancestors. I've been sharing them on my blog, but that doesn't necessarily reach my 3rd and 4th cousins. Can you suggest other ways I can share the links to these stories and videos?*

Instead of asking just one tool, I asked four:

- ChatGPT
- Claude
- Gemini
- Perplexity

Each gave thoughtful answers—but what really interested me was how similar their recommendations were.

What the AI Tools Agreed On

Even though each tool had a slightly different emphasis, they all pointed to the same core idea:

👉 **A blog is a great home base—but not a great distribution system.**

To reach cousins, especially 3rd and 4th cousins, I need to share my content in places where they are already spending time or where they are likely to encounter an ancestor's name.

Across all four responses, the suggestions fell into four clear categories:

1. Discovery Platforms (Where Cousins Search)

- Family trees (Ancestry, FamilySearch, WikiTree)
- YouTube (as a search engine for ancestor names)

2. Direct Outreach (Where Cousins Respond)

- Messaging DNA matches
- Emailing relatives

3. Social Sharing (Where Cousins Interact)

- Facebook groups (surname and locality-based)
- Genealogy communities

4. Ongoing Delivery (Where Cousins Stay Engaged)

- Newsletters or email lists
- Index pages or "landing pages" for your content

Turning Four AI Answers into One Workable Process

As I reviewed all four responses, it became clear that I needed something repeatable—especially since I write posts ahead of time and schedule them for future publication.

Here's the process I developed.

Phase 1: Create the Content (Before It Goes Live)

When I'm working on a biography, I should create a small "content package":

- The blog post (scheduled)
- The video (uploaded—can be unlisted at first)
- One image for sharing
- A short teaser (2–3 sentences)
- A question to invite responses

At the same time, I can begin adding the story to long-term discovery platforms:

- Add a Memory on FamilySearch
- Upload a Gallery image (with link) on Ancestry
- Add a link to the profile on WikiTree

These steps don't depend on the publication date—they simply make the content easier to find over time.

Phase 2: Share the Story (When the Post Goes Live)

This is where the biggest change happens.

Instead of just publishing the post and moving on, I now actively distribute it.

Step 1: Publish

- Publish the blog post

- Make the YouTube video public

Step 2: Reach Out to DNA Matches

This was emphasized by all four tools as the most targeted method.

I should send a short message like:

> "We share [ancestor name]. I created a short story/video about them and thought you might enjoy it."

Even a few messages can go a long way.

Step 3: Share on Facebook

I should post a short teaser with an image and a link in:

- Surname groups
- Locality groups

And I should always include a question to encourage interaction.

Step 4: Add to Ongoing Channels

- Publish blog on Substack to create a "newsletter"
- Add it to a running index page on my blog

A Simple System That Works

If I boil all of this down into a simple routine, it looks like this:

1. Create blog post and video
2. Add links to family tree platforms
3. Message a few DNA matches
4. Share in one or two Facebook groups
5. Include in a newsletter or index – such as Substack post

That combination provides:

- **Searchability** (trees + YouTube)
- **Direct contact** (DNA + email)
- **Conversation** (Facebook)

Final Thoughts

One of the most helpful insights from this exercise was realizing:

👉 My blog is not the destination—it's the foundation.

The real goal is to use that foundation to reach cousins in multiple ways:

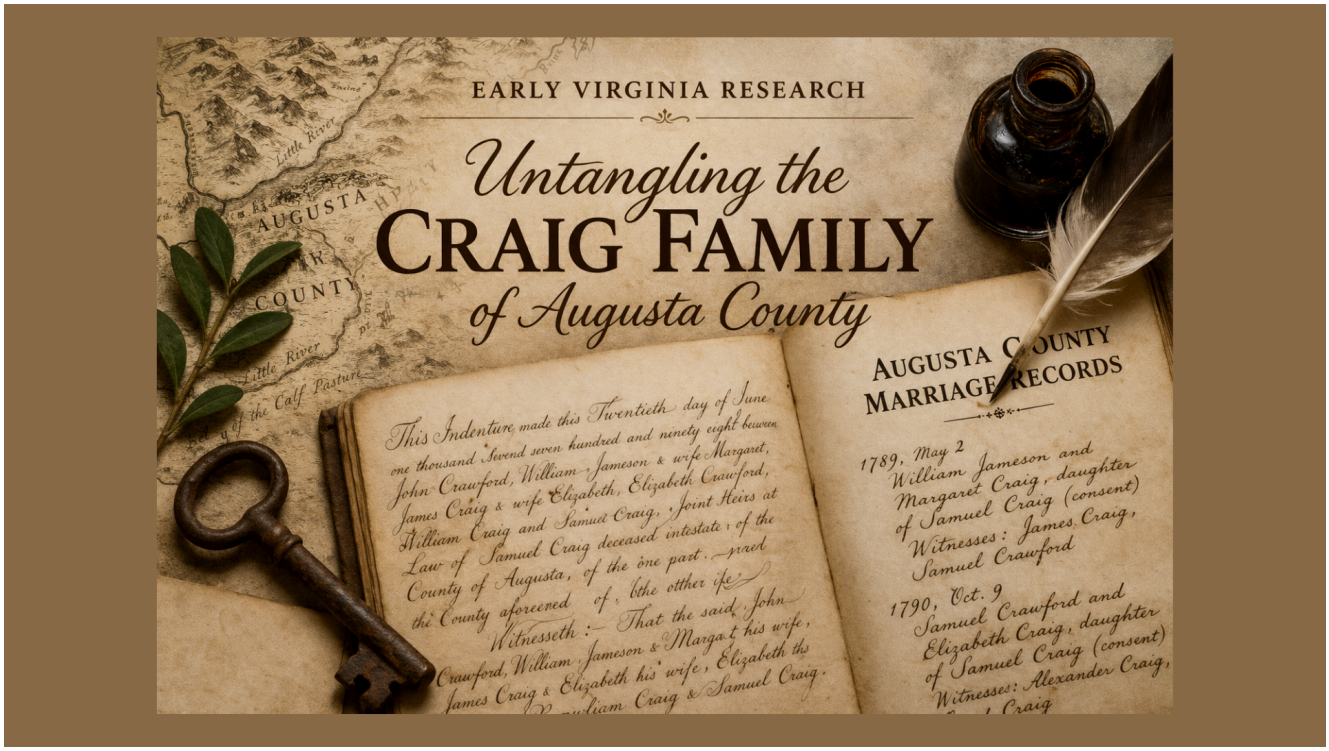
- When they search for an ancestor
- When they open an email
- When they scroll through Facebook
- Or when they receive a message from a newly discovered cousin

By combining those approaches, the stories I'm creating with AI have a much better chance of reaching the people they were really meant for—family.

Have you tried sharing your family stories beyond your blog? I'd love to hear what has worked for you!

Sorting Fact from Assumption

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 22, 2026
Augusta County,Crawford,Virginia
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/22/sorting-fact-from-assumption/



What the Records Really Say About the Craig and Crawford Families

When working with early Virginia records, it can be tempting to connect families quickly—especially when the same surnames appear together repeatedly. However, as I've been reminded in my recent work with the Craig and Crawford families of Augusta County, Virginia, the key is to separate what the records **actually say** from what we might assume they say.

In this post, I'm stepping back to look at five sets of information:

- Two deeds dated 20 June 1798
- Two marriage records from *Chronicles of the Scotch-Irish Settlement in Virginia*
- Compiled entries for Samuel Crawford and Martha Crawford from *Descendants of Alexander & Mary McPheeters Crawford*

The goal is simple: **What can we confidently conclude about these two families—and what remains unproven?**

What the Deeds Tell Us (1798)

The two Augusta County deeds identify the **heirs at law of Samuel Craig, deceased intestate**. Across these deeds, the following individuals are named:

- James Craig
- William Craig
- Alexander Craig
- Samuel Craig
- Margaret (wife of William Jameson)
- Elizabeth Crawford
- John Crawford

These deeds establish several important facts:

1. Samuel Craig died before June 1798 and left no will.
2. The individuals named are his heirs (or representing heirs).
3. Margaret and Elizabeth are daughters (identified through their marital status).

4. The Craig men listed are likely sons.

But the deeds do **not** tell us:

- Which Crawford man married which Craig daughter
- How John Crawford fits into the family

What the Marriage Records Tell Us (1789–1790)

The marriage records provide two key pieces of direct evidence:

- **1789** – William Jameson married Margaret Craig, daughter of Samuel Craig
- **1790** – Samuel Crawford married Elizabeth Craig

These records allow us to confidently state:

- Margaret Craig = wife of William Jameson
- Elizabeth Craig = wife of Samuel Crawford

This is critical because it prevents a common mistake—assuming that **Elizabeth Crawford in the deeds is the wife of John Crawford**. The marriage record clearly shows otherwise.

What the Forbes Book Tells Us (and What It Doesn't)

The compiled source *Descendants of Alexander & Mary McPheeters Crawford* adds helpful context, but it must be used carefully.

From the entries for Samuel Crawford and Martha Crawford, we learn:

- Samuel Crawford married Elizabeth Craig ✔
- Martha Crawford married Alexander Craig ✔
- Samuel Crawford died in 1795, leaving a widow Elizabeth ✔

The book also suggests a broader pattern of intermarriage between the Craig and Crawford families. However, these statements are often phrased as conclusions rather than documented facts.

Most importantly:

- The book does **not provide direct evidence** identifying
  - which Craig daughter married John Crawford
  - whether John Crawford was a sibling of Samuel or Martha Crawford

---

Pulling the Evidence Together

When we combine all five sources, we can construct a careful, evidence-based picture.

What Is Well Supported

- Samuel Craig had multiple heirs, including:
  - James, William, Alexander, and Samuel Craig
  - Margaret Craig (wife of William Jameson)
  - Elizabeth Craig (wife of Samuel Crawford)
- Elizabeth Craig married Samuel Crawford (not John Crawford)
- Martha Crawford married Alexander Craig
- Elizabeth Crawford appears in the 1798 deeds as an heir, likely representing her share after the death of her husband Samuel Crawford (proved 1795)

What Is Likely—but Not Proven

- John Crawford is named among the heirs of Samuel Craig
- His presence strongly suggests a connection to the Craig family

However:

- No record directly identifies his wife
- No record states that he married a daughter of Samuel Craig
- No record proves he is a sibling of Samuel or Martha Crawford

Why This Matters

This case highlights a key principle in genealogy:

> **Repeated association does not equal proven relationship.**

Yes, the Craig and Crawford families are clearly connected:

- Through marriage (Elizabeth Craig ↔ Samuel Crawford; Martha Crawford ↔ Alexander Craig)
- Through land transactions (1798 deeds)
- Through geographic proximity (Augusta County, Little Calf Pasture)

But we must resist the urge to **over-define those connections** without direct evidence.

A More Careful Conclusion

Based on the available records, we can confidently say:

- The Craig and Crawford families were closely associated in Augusta County
- At least two marriages connected the families
- A third connection involving John Crawford is possible—but not proven

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Final Thoughts

This is exactly the kind of situation where genealogy becomes both challenging and rewarding. The records give us just enough information to see the outline of a family network—but not enough to fill in every detail.

And that's okay.

Because good genealogy isn't about having all the answers—it's about knowing which answers are supported by evidence and which are still questions waiting to be explored.

If nothing else, this exercise is a reminder to:

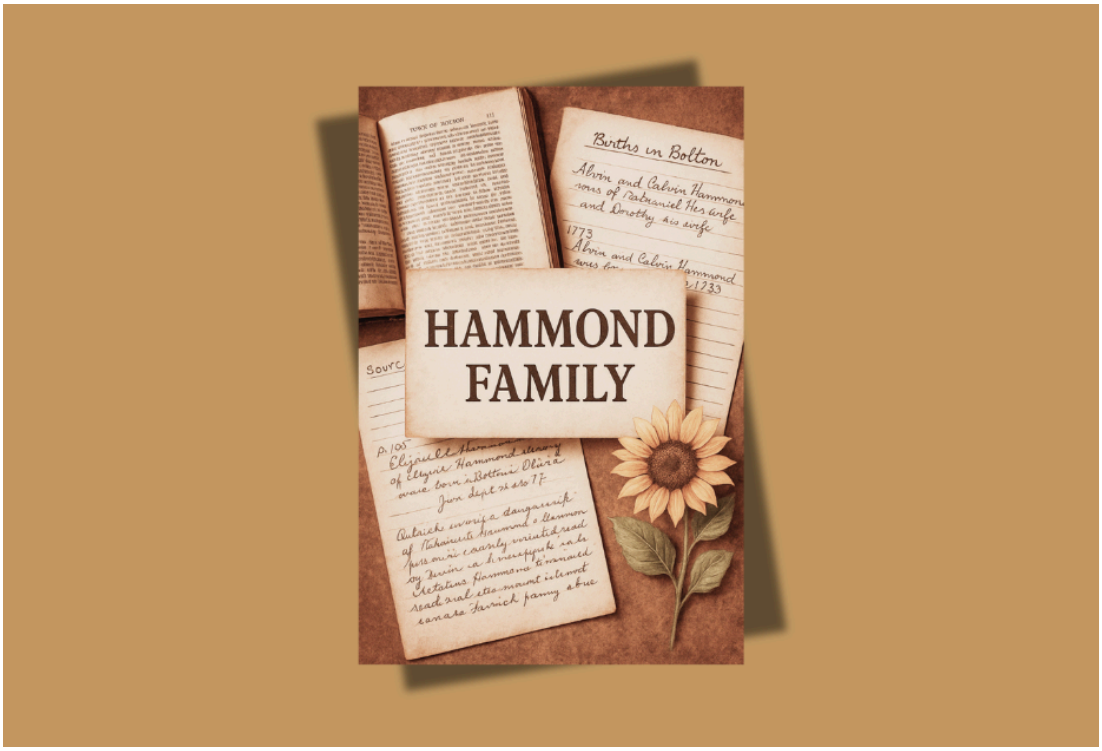
✔ Separate **fact from assumption**
✔ Let records speak for themselves
✔ Be comfortable with **"unknown" when the evidence requires it**

And perhaps most importantly:

👉 Keep digging.

Casting a Wider Net

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 23, 2026
Hammond
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/23/casting-a-wider-net/



How a Statewide Search Led to a Land Discovery

How broadly do you search newspapers?

Do you limit your search to the county where your ancestor lived? Or do you cast a wider net and search across an entire state?

A recent *find* is a perfect example of why a broader search can lead to unexpected—and valuable—discoveries.

Starting with a Broader Search

While searching Kansas newspapers for **"Sarah Hammond,"** I chose to search at the **state level** rather than limiting the search to a single county.

That decision paid off.

Instead of finding a simple mention or obituary, I uncovered two legal notices published in Pratt County newspapers:

- An 1891 **publication notice** announcing a foreclosure lawsuit
- An 1892 **sheriff's sale notice** confirming the court-ordered sale of land

Prior to finding these notices, I had **no idea that Richmond F. Hammond (and his wife Sarah) owned land in Pratt County, Kansas.**

Following the Lead

The legal notices provided more than just names—they included a **detailed land description** and identified Richmond and Sarah as defendants in a mortgage foreclosure case.

That was enough to send me down a new research path.

Using the land description and location (Pratt County), I searched the **Bureau of Land Management (BLM) records**—and there it was:

👉 A **federal land patent issued to Richmond F. Hammond**

Connecting the Records

The land patent confirmed that:

- Richmond F. Hammond acquired **160 acres** in Pratt County
- The land description **matched exactly** with the property in the foreclosure notices
- The patent was issued in **1890**

Now, when combined with the newspaper notices, a clear timeline emerges:

- **1885** – Richmond and Sarah Hammond execute a mortgage
- **1890** – Richmond receives the land patent from the federal government
- **1891** – A foreclosure lawsuit is filed
- **1892** – The land is sold at a sheriff's sale

In just a few steps, what started as a simple name search turned into a **complete story of land ownership and financial hardship**.

Why This Matters

If I had limited my newspaper search to only the county where I expected to find the Hammonds, I might have **missed these notices entirely**.

By searching more broadly:

✔ I discovered a **previously unknown residence** (Pratt County)
✔ I uncovered **land ownership details**
✔ I identified a **financial event that likely impacted the family's life and movement**
✔ I connected newspaper records to **federal land records**

A Reminder for All of Us

This find is a good reminder:

➡ Our ancestors didn't always stay in one place
➡ Important records may appear in **unexpected locations**
➡ Legal notices—often overlooked—can be incredibly rich sources

Sometimes, the key to a breakthrough is simply:

Search wider.

Final Thoughts

This find didn't just add a fact to my tree—it added a **story**.

A story of land acquisition, financial struggle, and loss—all uncovered because of a broader search strategy.

So the next time you sit down to search newspapers, consider stepping back and expanding your scope.

You never know what might be waiting just beyond your usual search boundaries.

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certificate # 2887
Osage Trust Lands

The United States of America
To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:
Whereas, Richmond F. Hammond of Pratt County, Kansas, has deposited in the General Land Office of the United States a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Larned, Kansas, whereby it appears that full payment has been made by the said Richmond F. Hammond according to the provisions of the Act of Congress of the 24th of April, 1820, entitled "An Act making further provision for the sale of the Public Lands," and the acts supplemental thereto, for:
The NE ¼ of the SE ¼, the NW ¼ of the SE ¼, the SW ¼ of the NE ¼, and the SE ¼ of the NW ¼, and the NE ¼ of the SW ¼ of Section twenty (20), Township twenty-seven (27), Range fourteen (14) West of the Sixth Principal Meridian, in Kansas, containing one hundred and sixty acres,

according to the official plat of the survey of the said lands returned to the General Land Office by the Surveyor General, which said tract has been purchased by the said Richmond F. Hammond.
Now know ye, That the United States of America, in consideration of the premises, and in conformity with the several acts of Congress in such case made and provided, have given and granted, and by these presents do give and grant, unto the said Richmond F. Hammond, and to his heirs, the said tract above described; to have and to hold the same, together with all the rights, privileges, immunities, and appurtenances, of whatsoever nature, thereunto belonging, unto the said Richmond F. Hammond and to his heirs and assigns forever.In testimony whereof, I, Benjamin Harrison,
President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.
Given under my hand, at the City of Washington, the thirtieth day of February, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety, and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and fourteenth.
By the President: Benjamin Harrison
By: M. McKean, Secretary

United States Bureau of Land Management, “General Land Office Records,” database with images, BLM.Gov (: viewed online 18 April 2026), Richmond Hammond certificate No. 2887 in Pratt county, Kansas.

NO. 1765.
First Publication, May 29, 1891

Publication Notice

State of Kansas to Henry Wilcox and Mrs. — Wilcox, his wife, real name unknown.

You will take notice that you have been sued, together with Richmond F. Hammond and Sarah E. Hammond, his wife, in the District Court in and for Pratt County, Kansas, by Coddington Savings Bank, and that unless you answer the petition filed in said suit on or before the 18th day of July, 1891, said petition will be taken as true and judgment rendered against you accordingly foreclosing a mortgage executed and delivered by Richmond F. Hammond and Sarah E. Hammond to Jarvis Conklin and Company, dated July 1st, 1885, on the following described real estate in Pratt County, Kansas, to-wit:

The northwest quarter of the southeast quarter and the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter and the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter and the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section twenty (20) in township twenty-seven (27), range fourteen (14) west, and for the sale of said real estate, without appraisement, to pay the debt secured by said mortgage.

Witness my hand and official seal this 19th day of May, 1891.

A. G. Roseborough,
Clerk District Court.

C. A. Taylor,
Deputy.

Beardsley & Gregory,
Attys. for Plaintiff.

“Publication Notice,” The Pratt County Times (Pratt, Kansas), 12 June 1891, page 2; digital images, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 18 April 2026).

No. 1765

SHERIFF’S SALE

First publication, June 10, 1892.

State of Kansas,
Pratt County, } ss

By virtue of an order of sale, dated the 3rd day of June 1892, issued out of the District Court in and for Pratt county, Kansas, in an action in said court wherein Coddington Savings Bank was plaintiff, and Richmond F. Hammond, Sarah E. Hammond his wife, Henry Wilcox and Mrs. — Wilcox his wife, real name unknown were defendants, I will, on Monday, the 11th day of July 1892 between the hours of 10 A. M. and 4 P. M. at the west front door of the court house in the city of Pratt, in said Pratt county, Kansas, offer at public sale and sell to the highest and best bidder, for cash in hand, all the right, title and interest of each and every of the above named parties in and to the following real estate, in said state and county, to-wit:

The northwest quarter of the southeast quarter, the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter, the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter and the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section twenty (20), township twenty-seven (27), range fourteen (14) west.

Said property will be sold as directed by said order of sale, without appraisement.

H. F. Williamson, sheriff Pratt county, Kansas.

Beardsley & Gregory, Attorneys,
Kansas City, Mo.

“Sheriff’s Sale,” The Pratt County Times (Pratt, Kansas), 8 July 1892, page 4; digital images, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 18 April 2026).

Friday Find: Andrew Jackson's Birthplace

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 24, 2026
Crawford,North Carolina
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/24/friday-find-andrew-jacksons-birthplace/

A Mysterious Crawford Document

Do you have items in your files that didn't come from your own research—but from someone else's?

Today's Friday Find is one of those.

This document came from my father's files, and while it ended up in my Crawford Kentucky folder, it quickly became clear that it likely has nothing to do with either Kentucky—or my Crawford family.

Instead, it points to something much bigger.

📜 The Document (and the Clue Attached)

The record includes:

- A hand-drawn plat of 110 acres
- A metes-and-bounds land description along Waxhaw Creek
- References to Thomas Crawford, James Crawford, and neighboring landowners

But the most important clue wasn't in the document itself—it was on an attached note:

> **"Pres Andrew Jackson birthplace, Janie Revill 1966"**

That single line shifted this from a routine land record to something far more intriguing.

🧠 A Shift in Focus

Once I stopped looking at this as a "Crawford record," the document began to make more sense.

The accompanying typed explanation clearly states:

> “This 110 acres is undoubtedly the place where Andrew Jackson was born…”

That ties the document directly into the long-standing debate over the birthplace of Andrew Jackson—whether he was born in North Carolina or South Carolina within the Waxhaw Settlement.

📚 Following the Janie Revill Lead

The name **Janie Revill** provided a valuable clue.

A quick search led me to a modern work:

- A Tale of Two Cabins: Searching for Andrew Jackson’s Birthplace by Robert Dunkerly

While Janie Revill is not the author, she is referenced in discussions about Jackson’s birthplace—suggesting she may have been a researcher, local historian, or contributor to earlier interpretations of the site.

This helps place the document in context:

- Likely part of **mid-20th century research**
- Possibly a **copied or distributed study** rather than an original record
- Connected to ongoing historical debate rather than family genealogy

---

🗺️ What the Document Suggests

The explanation included with the document ties the land to:

- A 110-acre tract along Waxhaw Creek
- Ownership linked to James Crawford and his son Thomas
- Possible earlier connection to Joseph Crawford
- Proximity to land associated with Andrew Jackson’s family

It even challenges established interpretations by noting:

- The land may be correct
- But the *exact house location* may not match traditional claims

---

🔍 A Different Kind of Friday Find

This isn’t a document that advances my Crawford research—at least not directly.

Instead, it’s a reminder of something else entirely:

- Not everything in our files belongs to our tree
- Some items reflect the research interests of those who came before us
- And sometimes, those items connect to **larger historical questions**

In this case, my father appears to have saved a piece of research tied to one of early America’s most debated birthplaces.

💡 Final Thoughts

I don’t yet know:

- Where my father obtained this document
- Whether Janie Revill created or shared this version
- Or how widely this interpretation was circulated

But I do know this:

It’s a fascinating example of how genealogy and history intersect—and how even unrelated documents can open the door to deeper understanding.

Sometimes, a “Friday Find” isn’t about your ancestors.

It’s about the stories that found their way into your files anyway.

Transcription of Document

Page 1 (handwritten deed & note):

Crawford, Ky. 104

[Plat drawing with bearings and distances]

Transcription (best reading):

Crawford to Wrenn
Thomas Crawford of Lancaster County and State aforesaid
for and in consideration of the sum of Ten pounds lawful money
to him in hand paid by William Wrenn of County aforesaid
hath granted bargained and sold and by these presents doth grant
bargain and sell unto the said William Wrenn his heirs and assigns
forever a tract or parcel of land containing one hundred and ten acres
lying and being on Waxhaw Creek joining Archibald Crockett and Isaac McCullough's land
and bounded as follows, viz:
beginning at a hickory joining Robert Crawford's land
then North 20 West 130 poles to a white oak
thence North 15 West 30 poles to a hickory
thence South 67 West 120 poles to a black oak
joining McCullough's land
thence South 67 East 95 poles to a white oak
thence South 35 East 126 poles to a black oak by a branch
thence with the branch to the beginning

Sept. 12th, 1768

Thos. Crawford

Typed note below image:

Supplied by Dept. of State, Raleigh, N. C. (Book A, page 86; Lancaster) has conveyance by Thos. Crawford to Wm. Wrenn.

Printed note at bottom:

This 110 acres is undoubtedly the place where Andrew Jackson was born, as claimed by South Carolina historians, and it is also the tract on which the house stood in which North Carolina historians claim he was born. Both claims are very correct. However, the land was not where the South Carolina historians have their memorial; and the house was not the McCamy house.

Page 2 (typed historical explanation):

Title:

JAMES CRAWFORD'S 110 ACRES

Transcription:

(This appears to be the remaining part of the 376 acres after a part had been sold off earlier, and it is assumed, by this writer, that the part previously sold off was the place purchased by Andrew Jackson, Senior, upon his arrival in the Waxhaw Settlement. Nearly all resurveys of land show a difference of a few acres.)

The location of this tract of land is perfectly identified by its recited boundaries and the manner in which it fits with the plantation plat of Robert Crawford. See the combined plats herewith and note the space between the lands of Archibald Crockett and Isaac McCulloch's land, and note how it fits the Robert Crawford plat. One inch on either of these plats represents 1/4 of a mile, on the original plats. Photo-copying might have made a little difference in the scale, but it cannot be very much at most. Moving upward 1 mile from the Waxhaw Creek Crossing, directly north, brings us to the very center of the plat of the 110 acres.

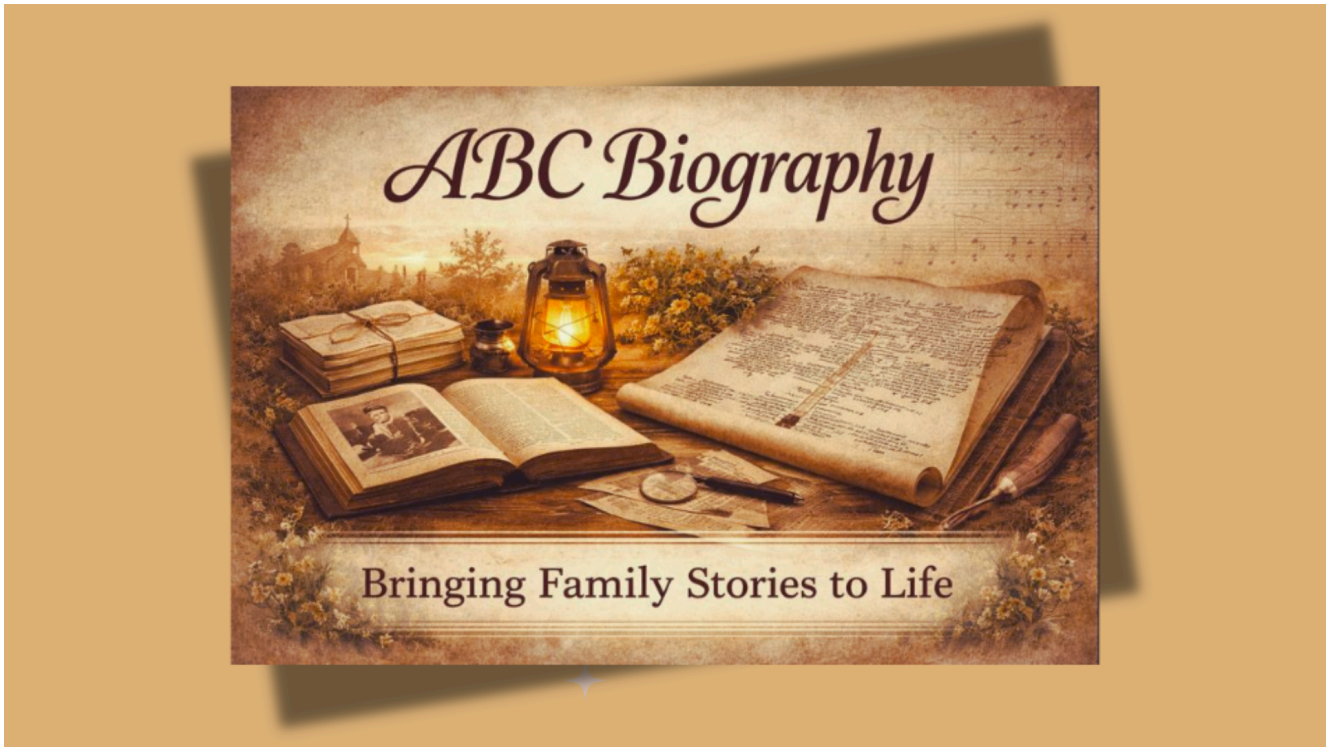
Lancaster Deed Book A, page 86, shows a conveyance of this tract of land by Thomas Crawford, son of James Crawford, deceased, to William Wrenn, dated November 22, 1784. He describes it as being 110 acres on the north side of Waxhaw Creek which was originally granted to Joseph Crawford, and bequeathed by James Crawford to his son Thomas Crawford, but does not explain how James Crawford got the title to it. The accompanying plat and grant by North Carolina to James Crawford shows how he got the title, but does not show reference to any previous grant to Joseph Crawford. This researcher has not been able to locate any connection of Joseph Crawford with this 110 acres, although he might have applied for a grant before he apparently moved to the Belfast Township area (Laurens County, S. C.), and he might have started the "improvements" which caused Thomas Crawford to think he had the original grant. Joseph Crawford signed as witness to a deed Nov. 15, 1770, the same year that Mrs. Jackson purchased the 200 acres on Leggett's Branch. (Laurens deed)

Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1, page 161, Charlotte, N. C., shows a deed dated March 26, 1766, conveyance by Samuel Barnett, a weaver of the Waxhaw Settlement, to Joseph Crawford, conveying 376 acres of land adjoining the lands of John Linn and Joseph White. (This would appear to be the title of the 110 acres into Joseph Crawford.)

Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5, page 144, shows a conveyance by Joseph Crawford and wife Agnes to Samuel Flanekan, carpenter of Mecklenburg County, dated October 15, 1768, covering a tract of 250 acres on the north side of Waxhaw Creek, adjoining the land of Robert Davis.

Sarah Ellen Ralston

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 25, 2026
ABC Biography,Dodge City,Hammond,Ralston
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/25/sarah-ellen-ralston/



From Pennsylvania to Dodge City: The Life and Faith of Sarah Ellen (Ralston) Hammond

One of the joys of revisiting earlier research is discovering that a familiar ancestor still has more to say.

In working with an updated narrative report for **Sarah Ellen (Ralston) Hammond**, I found that the addition of census household details and a full obituary transcription added both depth and personality to her story. What had once been a straightforward timeline now reads more like a life lived among family, faith, and perseverance.

A Pennsylvania Beginning

Sarah Ellen Ralston was born on **May 11, 1848 (or 1849)** in **Armstrong County, Pennsylvania**.

By the time of the **1850 census**, she was just one year old, living in North Buffalo Township in a full household headed by her parents, **James Barr and Jane Ralston**.

That household included several siblings:

- Amanda
- Matilda
- John
- James
- David

By **1860**, the family had moved west to **Knox County, Illinois**, and the household had expanded even further, now including:

- Matilda J.
- John M.
- James M.
- Frank D.
- Elias

- Margaret
- Olivia

This large and growing family reflects a common mid-19th-century pattern—families moving west together, building new lives while raising children along the way.

Marriage and a Growing Family

On **New Year's Day 1867**, Sarah married **Richmond Fisk Hammond** in Knoxville, Illinois.

Their early married years were spent in Illinois, where they began raising their family. By the **1870 census**, Sarah and Richmond were living in Ontario Township with two young children already at home.

Over the years, Sarah gave birth to a large family, including:

- Estella Mabel
- Forest Clinton
- Nellie Elida
- Josie Winifred
- Glenn M.
- Clyde Nelson

(Additional older children are also listed in compiled records.)

Like many mothers of her time, Sarah experienced both joy and loss. Her son Glenn died in infancy in 1878—a reminder of the realities families faced in the 19th century.

Moving West: Illinois to Iowa to Kansas

Sarah's life followed the westward path of many American families.

In **1874**, the Hammonds moved to **Iowa**, where they were recorded in the **1880 census in Hardin County** with five children in the household.

By **1884**, they moved again—this time to **Dodge City, Kansas**, a community still growing and evolving in the post-frontier era.

These moves—from Pennsylvania to Illinois, then Iowa, and finally Kansas—trace a familiar migration route for families seeking opportunity on the expanding American frontier.

A Life Marked by Illness—and Faith

What truly sets Sarah's story apart is preserved in her obituary.

According to that account, she developed an **incurable form of scrofula** just a few years after her marriage and lived with the disease for approximately **23 years**.

Her obituary paints a picture not just of suffering, but of remarkable endurance:

> "In the storm of physical agony that swept over her life, she ever realized that the divine arm was underneath her… 'Peace be still.'"

She was remembered as a woman of deep faith—"one of [Jesus'] most ardent disciples"—who bore her trials with patience and quiet strength.

Equally striking is the description of her husband's devotion. Richmond was said to have "patiently ministered at her bedside" and sacrificed greatly for her comfort during her long illness.

Death and Community Remembrance

Sarah died on **October 18, 1892**, in **Dodge City, Kansas**, at just 43 years of age.

Her funeral was held at the **First Presbyterian Church**, and the community response speaks volumes about the family's place in Dodge City. Members of the **Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.)**, with which her husband was affiliated, attended in a body—an indication of both respect and support.

She was laid to rest on **October 20, 1892**, at **Maple Grove Cemetery**.

Final Thoughts

Sarah Ellen (Ralston) Hammond's life reflects many familiar themes—migration, family, and frontier life—but her story is made especially powerful through the details preserved in her obituary.

Census records give us structure: names, places, and dates.
But the obituary gives us something more—insight into how she was remembered.

A woman of faith.
A devoted wife and mother.
A life marked by hardship, yet defined by endurance.

And thanks to both types of records, we are able to see her more clearly today.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 26, 2026
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun,Thompson
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/26/saturday/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's **Saturday Night again** —
time for some more **Genealogy Fun!!**

Here is your assignment if you choose to play along (cue the Mission Impossible music, please!):

1. Who Is Ancestor #50 in your Ahnentafel list? What were his birth date and place, his parents, death date and place, spouse's name, marriage date and place, and how many children they had—and which of his children do you descend from?

Ancestor #50: William T. Thompson

Number **50** in my Ahnentafel is **William T. Thompson**.

- **Born:** 29 December 1820, Ohio
- **Died:** 12 September 1898, Wapello County, Iowa
- **Buried:** Ottumwa Cemetery, Ottumwa, Iowa

William T. Thompson was the son of John Thompson and Sarah Iglehart.

Marriage

William married **Polly Ann Evans** on **29 October 1842** in Warrick County, Indiana.

Polly Ann Evans was born **25 July 1821 in Indiana** and died **14 April 1896 in Wapello County, Iowa**.

Life and Migration

William's life reflects a classic mid-19th century migration pattern:

- Born in Ohio (though later census records suggest Kentucky origins)
- Married and lived in **Warrick County, Indiana** in the 1840s
- Moved to **Wapello County, Iowa by 1847**

By 1850, he was established as a farmer in Iowa, owning real estate and raising a growing family. Over the years, he expanded his land holdings and farming operations, with census and agricultural records documenting:

- Increasing land ownership
- Livestock and crop production (including corn, wheat, and wool)
- A steadily growing household

By 1870 and 1880, William had become a relatively prosperous farmer, with significant real estate value and a well-developed farm.

Children

William T. Thompson and Polly Ann Evans had **at least nine children**:

1. Sarah Jane Thompson
2. John Evans Thompson
3. William F. Thompson
4. Martha E. Thompson
5. Julia A. Thompson
6. Amanda Ellen Thompson
7. Arcena M. Thompson
8. Polly Ann Thompson
9. Clara Belle Thompson

My Line of Descent

I descend from their daughter:

➡️ **Sarah Jane Thompson** (born 7 August 1843, Indiana)
She married **Noah Washington Briles** on 9 August 1866 in Ottumwa, Iowa.

Final Thoughts

William T. Thompson's life tells the story of westward movement, land ownership, and agricultural growth in the mid-1800s. From Indiana to Iowa, he built a life centered on farming and family—leaving behind a large number of descendants and a strong paper trail through land, census, and probate records.

His missing parentage is a reminder that even well-documented ancestors can still hold unanswered questions—making him a great candidate for future research!

If you play along, I'd love to hear about your **Ahnentafel #50**!

Monday

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 27, 2026
Hutchinson,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/27/monday/

An Obituary Rich in History — Nancy Wells Hutchinson

One of the things I enjoy most about going back through my older research folders is rediscovering documents I collected years ago—often before I fully understood their value.

This week's "digging" comes from my **WELLS folder**: an unsourced photocopy of an obituary for **Nancy Hutchinson**, wife of Judge Miron Hutchinson. At first glance, it seemed like a simple obituary. But as I read more carefully, I realized it contains a wealth of family connections and local history—exactly the kind of record that rewards a second look.

Interestingly, Nancy appears differently across online trees:

- On FamilySearch, she is listed as *Irene Nancy Wells*
- On WikiTree, she appears as *Nancy Wells*

This obituary may help shed light on that question.

Transcription of the Obituary

(Cleaned and formatted for readability)

Death of Mrs. Nancy Hutchinson

Within less than a week after the death of Mrs. Martha Cutler and residing directly across the street where Mrs. Cutler lived, died Mrs. Nancy Hutchinson, the relict of the late Judge Miron Hutchinson. After the death of Mrs. Cutler she was the oldest person residing in Girard borough, having attained the ripe old age of 87 years. She also had retained her mental faculties to the last moment, but had for several years not enjoyed as good bodily health as Mrs. Cutler, and for the last four or five months was entirely blind. She breathed her last early Tuesday morning.

Mrs. Hutchinson was closely connected with the earliest history of this borough as will be seen by the following brief biographical sketch: She was born in Saratoga Co., N.Y., June 12th, 1792. Her maiden name was Nancy Wells. She married Miron Hutchinson (the late Judge Hutchinson) in Fenner, Madison Co., N.Y., and with him removed to Girard in the spring of 1818, her brother, Joseph Wells, coming and settling here at the same time. Her father, Thurston Wells, had preceded them some time, and had purchased 200 acres of

land, upon which the bulk of our borough now stands. Upon his death the land was equally divided between her husband and her brother Joseph. The latter donated the public square to the new town about being laid out on the lands comprising the Wells farm and named the town Girard, out of compliment to Stephen Girard, of Philadelphia.

Mrs. Hutchinson's mother's name was Irene Badger; she was descended from the Thurstons and Greenes of Rhode Island, and was not a very distant relative of General Nathaniel Greene, the Rhode Island blacksmith of Revolutionary fame. She was a good and true woman, and a kind and affectionate mother. She is survived by four children, namely Monroe, Mrs. Lydia Clemens of Erie, Mrs. Eliza Orr, and David Wells. Her funeral will take place from the residence of her son, Monroe Hutchinson, Esq., today (Tuesday) at 2 o'clock P.M.

What This Obituary Tells Us

This is far more than a death notice—it's a mini-biography packed with clues.

1. Clear Identification of Her Name

The obituary explicitly states:

> *"Her maiden name was Nancy Wells."*

This is important. While FamilySearch lists her as **Irene Nancy Wells**, the obituary suggests:

- *Nancy* was the name she used in life
- *Irene* was likely inherited from her mother (Irene Badger)

This may indicate:

- A naming tradition
- Or a later-added name in compiled trees rather than a contemporary usage

---

2. A Multi-Generational Family Snapshot

The obituary provides a rare, well-structured family grouping:

Parents:

- Thurston Wells
- Irene Badger

Sibling:

- Joseph Wells

Husband:

- Judge Miron Hutchinson

Children:

- Monroe Hutchinson
- Lydia (Hutchinson) Clemens
- Eliza (Hutchinson) Orr
- David Wells Hutchinson

That's essentially an entire family group sheet—something we usually have to piece together from multiple records.

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3. Migration Pattern: New York to Pennsylvania

The obituary traces a clear migration path:

- Born: Saratoga County, New York (1792)
- Married: Fenner, Madison County, New York
- Migrated: Girard, Pennsylvania in 1818

Even better—it shows this was a **family migration**, not an individual move:

- Her father moved first
- Then Nancy and her husband

- Then her brother Joseph

This is a classic example of **chain migration**, something we often look for when building FAN clubs.

---

4. Founding of Girard, Pennsylvania

This is where the obituary becomes especially valuable.

We learn that:

- Thurston Wells purchased **200 acres**
- That land became **the foundation of the borough**
- Joseph Wells donated the **public square**
- The town was named **Girard** after Stephen Girard

This places Nancy's family at the **very center of the town's founding**

For a genealogist, this is gold:

- It connects the family to land records
- It suggests potential early deeds and plats
- It elevates the family from "residents" to "founders"

---

5. Deep New England Roots

The obituary also reaches further back:

- Nancy's mother: **Irene Badger**
- Lineage tied to:
  - Thurston family
  - Greene family of Rhode Island
- Claimed connection to **General Nathanael Greene**

Whether fully provable or not, this gives:

- A research direction into Rhode Island families
- A potential Revolutionary War-era connection

---

6. Personal Details That Bring Her to Life

Beyond names and dates, we get glimpses of Nancy as a person:

- Lived to age **87**
- Mentally sharp until the end
- Blind in her final months
- Described as:
  - "a good and true woman"
  - "a kind and affectionate mother"

These are the kinds of details that help us move beyond facts into storytelling.

Why This Record Matters

This obituary is a perfect example of why it pays to revisit old, unsourced documents.

In a single clipping, we gained:

- A full family structure
- Migration details
- Land ownership and community history
- Possible Revolutionary-era connections
- Insight into her identity and naming

And perhaps most importantly—it helps us evaluate conflicting online data.

Final Thoughts

This “Monday’s Digging” is a great reminder:

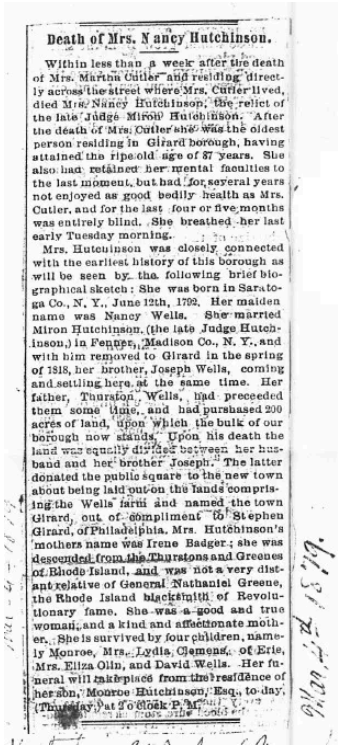
Sometimes the records we already have—tucked away in folders—hold more information than we realized when we first found them.

Now the next step is clear:

- Locate the original newspaper source
- Correlate these details with deeds and census records
- And explore the Wells family’s role in the founding of Girard

Because this obituary doesn’t just tell us when Nancy died…

It helps tell the story of how her family helped build a community.



Death of Mrs. Nancy Hutchinson.

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Cinematic Videos – A Cautionary Tale

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 28, 2026
Artificial Intelligence,Hammond,Ralston
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/28/cinematic-videos-a-cautionary-tale/

Cinematic Videos and the Question of Accuracy

I love using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to help tell my ancestors' stories. Over time, I've found that tools like Google NotebookLM can pull meaningful details from my genealogy narrative reports—sometimes highlighting aspects of an ancestor's life that I hadn't fully appreciated before.

Its audio overviews and cinematic videos, in particular, can transform a written report into something engaging and memorable.

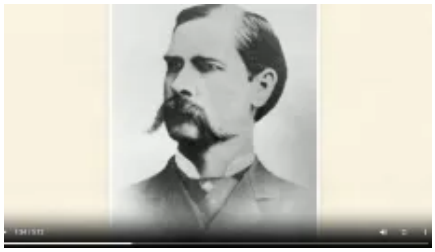
But recently, I ran into a situation that made me pause—and rethink how I use these tools.

When the Visuals Don't Match the Facts

I asked NotebookLM to create a cinematic video for my great-great-grandmother, Sarah Ellen Ralston, titled *"Anatomy of an Obituary: The Geography of Endurance."*

The storytelling was beautiful.

But then I noticed something unsettling.



The video included what appeared to be a historical photograph of her husband, Richmond Fisk Hammond. At first glance, it looked believable—very much like the real photos I have of him.

But it wasn't him.

It was an AI-generated image.

And that's where the problem begins.

Trying to Correct the Record

To avoid confusion, I uploaded an actual photograph of Richmond Hammond into NotebookLM and asked if it could recreate the video using the real image.

The response was helpful—but also limiting:

> *"I understand wanting to use the real photo… Unfortunately, I am unable to incorporate custom uploaded photos into the video overviews. The visuals are generated automatically…"*

In other words, the tool simply can't guarantee visual accuracy when it comes to people.

And for genealogists, that matters.

Because once a video is shared, viewers may assume every image in it is authentic.

A Better Approach

So I tried a different strategy.

Instead of asking for a cinematic video with people, I asked:

> *"Can you create a cinematic video about Sarah Ellen Ralston without using images of people?"*

That one change made all the difference.

The resulting video still told her story—but without introducing misleading imagery. No invented faces. No confusion about identity. Just the narrative, supported by neutral visuals.

What This Means for Genealogists

AI-generated storytelling tools are powerful—but they're not neutral. They make creative choices, especially with visuals.

And when those visuals look like historical photographs, they can unintentionally blur the line between fact and fiction.

For those of us working to document real lives and real people, that's a line we need to keep very clear.

For now, I'll continue using cinematic videos—but with a more cautious approach:

- Avoiding AI-generated "photographs" of individuals
- Using abstract or non-human imagery when possible
- Clearly labeling AI-generated content when I share it

Final Thoughts

I still love what AI tools can do. They help bring our ancestors' stories to life in ways that weren't possible just a few years ago.

But this experience was a good reminder:
just because something looks real doesn't mean it is.

And in genealogy, accuracy always comes first.

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https://youtube.com/watch?v=0lTjkGmZRAI

RootsMagic Notes

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 29, 2026
RootsMagic
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/29/rootsmagic-notes/

Discovering "Role Notes" in Shared Events

As a former user of The Master Genealogist (TMG), there are still moments—years after switching to RootsMagic—when I find myself missing certain features. One of those has always been the "memo" field.

In TMG, memo fields were incredibly flexible. You could enter detailed information and then build complex, customized sentences around that content. While RootsMagic offers a similar sentence-building structure, it doesn't use the same "memo" concept. Instead, it encourages users to place that extra detail into the **Notes** field for each event. Since those notes can be included in narrative reports, the end result can feel very similar.

Recently, I've been making more use of **shared events**—especially for census records—and I've found them to be incredibly useful for keeping families connected within a single event. Naturally, I wanted the note attached to that shared event to appear in my narrative report.

But it didn't.

That sent me searching for answers. I turned to the RootsMagic Community expecting to find a workaround… and instead, I discovered a feature I hadn't fully appreciated before: **Role Notes**.

> Are we talking about the same thing? You can have witness notes (I call them role notes) and they are printed in reports without needing a [Note] variable.

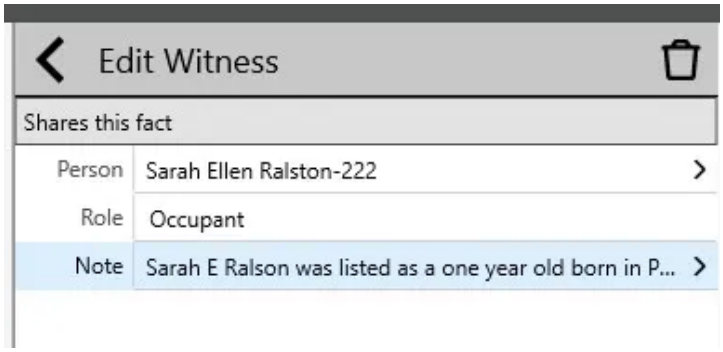
Posted March 2023

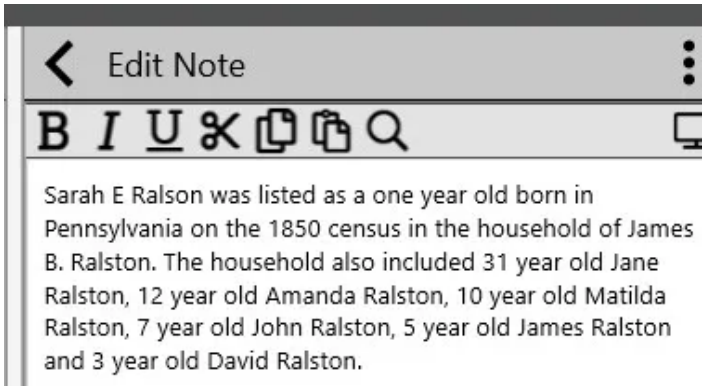
I'm sure I had seen that note field when sharing an event. But until now, I hadn't realized just how powerful it could be.

Here's how I used it:

- I returned to the shared event.
- In the **"Shared With"** list, I located the individual I was working on.

- I clicked the arrow (>) to open that person's details.
- There, I found the **Note** field specific to that role and entered my information.
- I then generated a narrative report—with notes included—and this time… it worked.




Edit Note
Sarah E Ralson was listed as a one year old born in Pennsylvania on the 1850 census in the household of James B. Ralston. The household also included 31 year old Jane Ralston, 12 year old Amanda Ralston, 10 year old Matilda Ralston, 7 year old John Ralston, 5 year old James Ralston and 3 year old David Ralston.

The note attached to the role printed exactly as I had hoped.

She was the child of James Barr Ralston.[7]

Sarah appeared in the 1 Jul 1850 census in North Buffalo Township, Armstrong, Pennsylvania, United States in the household of James Barr Ralston.[8] Sarah E Ralson was listed as a one year old born in Pennsylvania on the 1850 census in the household of James B. Ralston. The household also included 31 year old Jane Ralston, 12 year old Amanda Ralston, 10 year old Matilda Ralston, 7 year old John Ralston, 5 year old James Ralston and 3 year old David Ralston.

She lived in Knoxville, Knox, Illinois, United States in 1854.[4]

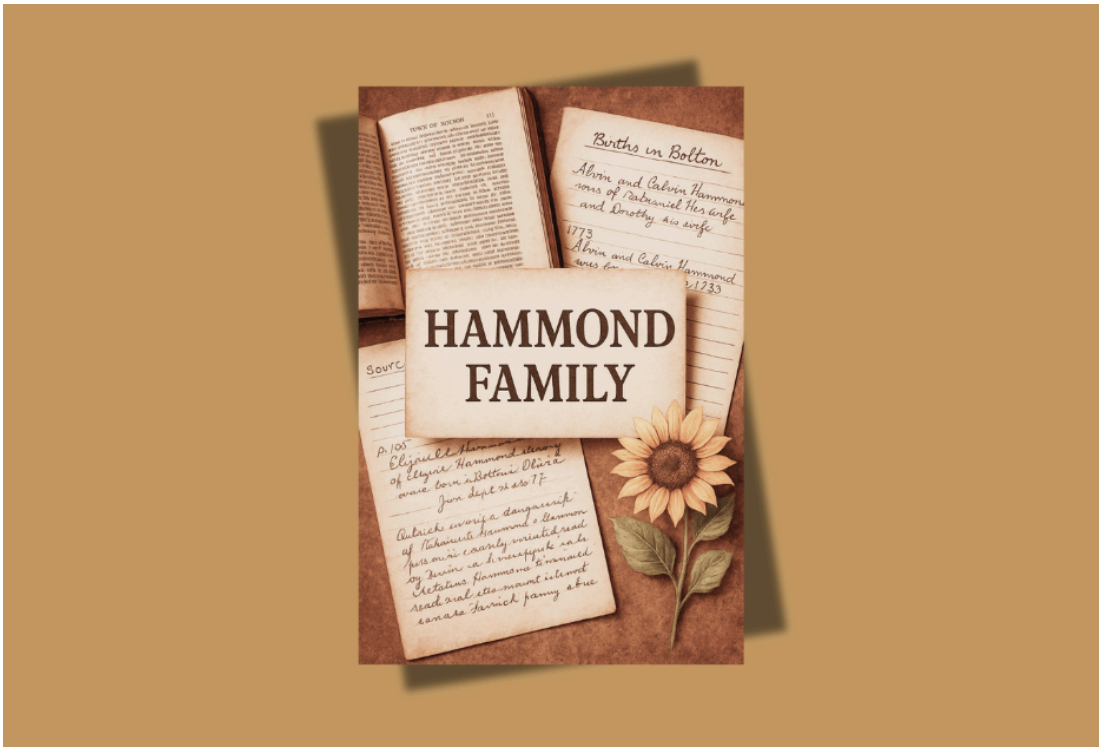
It was one of those "aha" moments—simple, but incredibly useful.

I'll admit, I might have discovered this sooner if I had watched more of the RootsMagic tutorials. But like many of us, I tend to learn best by doing (and occasionally by getting stuck!). So I'm especially grateful to the RootsMagic Community for pointing me in the right direction.

If you've been wishing for something like TMG's memo fields when working with shared events, take a closer look at **Role Notes**. You might find they do exactly what you need.

Peace Be Still

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
April 30, 2026
ABC Biography,Artificial Intelligence,Hammond,Ralston
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2026/04/30/peace-be-still/



Telling Sarah's Story Through Song

Have you been following Randy Seaver and his use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)? If so, you may have noticed that he often creates songs about his ancestors.

I'll admit—at first, I wondered why.

Why a song? Why not just tell the story?

And then I created one.

And then another.

And somewhere along the way, I realized something I hadn't expected—these songs don't just tell a story. They *feel* like the story. More than once, I've found myself listening… and tearing up. There's something about hearing the words set to music that brings an ancestor's life into sharper focus in a way the written word sometimes can't.

Sarah's Story, Set to Music

Below is a song inspired by the life of **Sarah Ellen (Ralston) Hammond**—a woman whose story spans Pennsylvania, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas, and whose life was marked by both family and faith.

The process behind the song is one I've come to use regularly:

- The **lyrics and cover image** were created using ChatGPT
- The **audio** was generated using Suno
- The **final video**—combining image and music—was created in Canva

Each step builds on the last, turning research into something you can both see and hear.

“Peace Be Still”

https://youtube.com/watch?v=723QJO7n3R4

Why This Matters

As genealogists, we spend so much time gathering facts—names, dates, places, documents. Those are essential. They form the foundation of our work.

But sometimes, it’s the storytelling—the *human side*—that brings those facts to life.

For me, these songs have become another way to connect with my ancestors. Not as names on a page, but as people who lived, struggled, believed, and endured.

And in Sarah’s case, her story—especially her long illness and deep faith—seems especially suited to music.

Final Thoughts

I’m beginning to understand why Randy creates these songs.

Because sometimes, the story needs more than words.

Sometimes… it needs a melody.